

The Ethics of Remembrance: The S-21 Photographs

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ABSTRACT

The Ethics of Remembrance: The S-21 Photographs

Jacqueline Sischy

The year 2008 marks another milestone in the history of Cambodia's gruesome genocide. Almost thirty years after the tragic crusade, which killed 1.4 million people – one-sixth of Cambodia's population – five Khmer Rouge leaders may finally be prosecuted by a United Nations special tribunal. In 1979, when the Vietnamese conquered the Khmer Rouge, they stumbled upon the important facility, S-21, also referred to as the Tuol Sleng prison, where an estimated 14,000 people had been killed between 1975 and 1979. During that period, prisoners accused of treason, were systematically photographed in the form of a mug shot on arrival, just prior to their extermination. These photographs have become visual symbols of the Khmer Rouge cruelty. They now line the walls of the Tuol Sleng Museum, and have appeared in controversial exhibitions, notably the exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, (MoMA) *Photographs from S-21: 1975-1979*, presented in 1997, and the touring exhibition *Facing Death*, which appeared at the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, Ottawa (CMCP) in 2000. The research for this thesis included interviews with Susan Kismaric, curator of photography at the department at MoMA, and Carol Payne, former assistant curator at CMCP who proposed and coordinated the exhibition of *Facing Death* at the museum. In discussion with the curators, questions of institutional ethics, audience reception, and photographic historicism were analyzed with the benefit of hindsight and new information. This thesis critically assesses the archival techniques, exhibition practices, and the ethical quandaries surrounding the S-21 photographs. In doing so, it explores how museums and archival institutions have utilized the S-21 photographs to help structure historical memory.

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INTRODUCTION

Imagining the Unthinkable: L'exposition du génocide

In October 2007, as a second year M.A Art History Student at Concordia University, I participated as a member of a curatorial team in the organization of an exhibition entitled *Imagining the Unthinkable: L'exposition du génocide*. Sponsored by the McGill Center for Human Rights and Legal Pluralism, the exhibition was held in conjunction with an international conference, The Global Conference on the Prevention the Genocide held at McGill University in Montreal. The non-governmental conference invited activist, legislators, academics, witnesses and survivors from around the world to debate preventive measures to international genocides, as opposed to ad hoc intervention.

The three-day conference was ambitious in scope, drawing notable experts to discuss a broad range of issues, including governmental policies, economic factors, media strategies, and the ineffectiveness of the United Nations. Survivors who endured twentieth- century atrocities offered valuable insights through candid testimonials. Through a series of panel discussions experts debated the following genocides; The Armenian genocide 1915-1923, The Shoa 1941-1945, The Roma and Sinti Holocaust 1941-1945, the Biafran War (Nigerian Civil War), July 1967-January 1970, Uganda under Idi Amin, January 1971- April 1979, Cambodia 1975-1979, "Red Terror" in Ethiopia, 1977-1978, Indigenous repression in Guatemala, 1981-1983, the *anfal* campaign against the Kurds in Norther Iraq 1988-1991, Bosnia-Herzegovina 1992-1995, Rwanda 1994, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) 1998- 2007 and the ongoing travesties in Sudan, Darfur 2003-.

The conference included talks by notable experts in the field who have engaged directly in policy-making decisions, and the front lines of the battlefield such as Lieutenant-General Roméo Dallaire, who was the Force Commander of the United Nations Assistance Mission to Rwanda (UNAMIR) in 1993-4. Due to the notorious failure of the United Nations and the international community to respond to the Rwanda travesty Lt.-Gen (ret.) Dallaire oversaw underequipped forces who had to watch helplessly as up to of 800 000 Rwanda civilians were murdered. The conference created panel discussions such as *Violence Early Warning: Triggering the UN into Action* and *Inducing the Will to Act: Humanitarian Intervention and the Responsibility to Protect against Genocide* which often situated policy makers in direct discussion with survivors of the respective war crimes to help derive new strategic outlooks. Esther Mujawayo, survivor of the Rwandan Genocide, and author and founder of AVEGA widow's organization, notably remarked at the opening ceremonies that academic conferences can too often be out of touch with the reality of those living through wartime.¹ To listen, she proposed, to those whose lives had been directly affected, was as a key to overcoming cultural barriers that often render policy guidelines ineffectual.

Conference organizers proposed the lofty ideal that by studying previous genocides through the various angles of government officials, academic authorities, and first-hand accounts through genocide survivors, a dialogue could be created to help

¹ Paraphrased from Esther Mujawayo's presentation at Panel discussion *Speaking the Unspeakable: Listening to the Voices of Survivors*. The Panelists included; Hédi Fried ,Jewish Holocaust survivor; Marika Nene, Roma Holocaust survivor; Youk Chang, Cambodian genocide survivor and Esther Mujawayo ,Rwandan genocide survivor . The Respondents were Wole Soyinka , Nobel Laureate in Literature Lt. General (ret.); Roméo Dallaire, Member of Canadian Senate, former commander of UN peacekeeping forces in Rwanda and Sir Shridath Ramphal ,former Secretary-General of the British Commonwealth.

conceptualize and ultimately implement preventative strategies for future outbreaks. International awareness was viewed by conference participants as a key to helping unite a global community to conquer genocidal forces. To this end, the conference proposed an exhibition which would bring visceral awareness through visual testimony to conference attendees, and the surrounding Montreal community. The exhibition, which was held in the McGill Law School Atrium,² featured photography, drawing, graphic art and a video archive of survivor testimonies in order to visually confront the genocides in Cambodia, Darfur, Guatemala, the Holocaust and Rwanda. The curatorial team consisted of art history graduate students from Concordia University and Law school students from the McGill Centre for Rights and Legal Pluralism. Karen Crawley, and Arezou Farivar-Mohensi, students at the McGill Faculty of Law, helped to work as exhibition liaisons, facilitating a dialogue between the exhibition committee and the larger conference. The curatorial team had to arrange an exhibition based on a selection of material organized through the exhibition liaison's who facilitated the transfer of works from various international agencies. All of the work had been pre-selected for the curatorial and liaison teams; our assignments were to ensure the installation and interaction with the audience.

The USC Shoah Foundation Institutes lent an archive collection of nearly 52,000 video testimonies in thirty-two languages that include testimonial interviews with Jewish, homosexual, Jehovah's Witness Roma and Sinti holocaust survivors. In conjunction, the visual archive presented interviews with war crimes trials participants, political prisoners, aid providers, and World War two liberators. The extensive archival material was

² The McGill Law School Atrium is located at 3660 Peel street. A segment of the exhibition was held in the foyer of McGill University's Library and McLennan Library Building

presented through various computer outlets that could be easily accessed by the visiting public. In order to address the fate of the Roma and Sinit during the Holocaust the Roma Press Center, the Romedia Foundation, and the Rome Museum loaned a collection of portrait photographs depicting survivors in their later years. To accompany the images, survivors, such as Krasnai Rudolfne, wrote textual testimonials describing their own experiences through the genocide. (Figure 1) The portraits, sympathetic in tone, were shipped to Montreal from Budapest, where they were hosted by the Holocaust Documentation Centre.

Three traveling exhibitions used photography, graphic design, and textual narratives to concentrate on the Rwandan massacres of 1994. The first entitled *We Said Never Again: The Silent Voices of Rwanda* involved the presentation of touching letters created by twenty-eight teens from six high schools in Markham, Ontario. The letters depict exchanges between the Canadian high school students and their pen-pals; peers of similar age brackets in Rwanda. The letters were created in the years leading up to the genocide when the young participants' dismal fate was still unknown. A *United Nations Mobile Exhibition* (Figure 2) was exhibited next to the children's letters, which contextualizes the youthful writing through textual narratives interspersed with historical photographs to help present a chronological overview of the Rwandan atrocity. The exhibit, which was organized by the Aegis Trust, was originally launched at the United Nations Headquarters in New York on April 7 2005, the 13th anniversary of the beginning of the Rwandan Genocide. To further humanize the historical atrocity Rupert Bazambanza presented his graphic novel *Smile through the Tears* (Figure 3), which

depicts the true story of a Tutsi family, the Rwangas, and their fate before, during and after the genocide. Bazambanza, who was born in 1975, survived the Rwandan genocide and subsequently emigrated to Montreal in 1997 where he lives and works as a graphic artist.

Photographs by Jonathan Moller brought awareness to the genocidal campaign of Guatemala, which has received minimal media coverage. Jonathan Moller is an American photographer who between the years of 1992 and 2001 worked as a human rights advocate and free-lance photographer in Guatemala, principally working with indigenous Mayans who had been displaced due to the country's civil war. Moller Explains,

Between 1993 and 2001 I worked as a human rights advocate and free-lance photographer in Guatemala, principally working with indigenous Mayans uprooted by that country's long and brutal civil war. I spent much of my time in rural areas, working to support Guatemala's displaced and refugee populations in their struggle for respect of their basic rights.³

Moller photographed members of the Mayan community in various stages of mourning, suffering and resilience as their surrounding country fell into turmoil and subsequently published the photographs in his book *Our Culture is Our Resistance: Repression, Refuge and Healing in Guatemala* (2004).(Refer to Figure 9, 10, and 11)

³Jonathan Moller Website, "Our Culture is Our Resistance," 2004.
http://www.jonathanmoller.org/Port_txt_eng/port1_text.htm

To highlight the ongoing plight in Darfur, an exhibition entitled *The Children of Darfur: Surviving Genocide* was sent to McGill courtesy of the Darfur Alert Coalition,⁴ which touchingly displayed a variety of violent drawings revealing the perceptive lens of children's eyes. (Figure 4 and 5). The drawings were created in response to a question that Dr. Jerry Ehrlich, a pediatrician who had worked with Doctors without Borders in Darfur posed to various children. He asked them to "Draw what your life in Darfur is." The resultant images that depict bombs, helicopter raids, and machine guns, bluntly offer a peek into the violence plaguing western Sudan.

Behind a velvet black curtain in the back corner of the McGill atrium, a projector displayed mugs shots of Cambodian woman and men of various ages who stared stoically towards the camera. (Figure 6, 7, 8). The images, set to dissolve, were organized and sent to the curators by Ben Kiernan, founder of the Genocide Studies Program at Yale University's MacMillan Center for International and Area Studies, and former director of the Cambodia Genocide Program. In his capacity as director, Professor Kiernan was supported by the US. State Department to conduct influential research that unveiled documents attesting to the genocidal crimes of the Khmer Rouge.

At first glance, viewers were unsure about what they were looking at, frequently asking gallery attendants who the people in the slideshow were...why there were numbers at the bottom of the print...were these people criminals...political prisoners? Without textual guidance helping to mediate the interaction with the images viewers had very little insight into the disturbing context that surrounding the photographs. The

⁴ Darfur Alert is a coalition of Sudanese and American activists who work towards security, justice and healing for the genocide in Darfur. <http://www.darfuralert.org/>

photographs, which are frequently referred to as the S-21 images, were systematically taken at the Toul Sleng Prison (also called S-21), a torture house created by the Khmer Rouge forces in the years between 1975, and 1979 where more than 14 000 people were to be killed. The photographs were taken as a monitoring device to help KR commanders document the marked execution of their suspected enemies. Children, men, and woman who were suspected of threatening the regime were handcuffed, taken to Tuol Sleng where they were tortured, forced to sign a confession of which they were not guilty, and eventually killed, either at the site, or more often in a field, Choeun Ek, just outside the city. The photographs and completed confessions were then submitted to the DK authorities as evidence that the targeted ‘enemies of the DK’ were executed. In retrospect, perhaps more textual guidance should have been offered to viewers to help inform them about the S-21 photographic context.

In our curatorial meetings for *Imagining the Unthinkable: L'exposition du genocide* we frequently discussed various approaches to the visual depiction of horror. As the three-day conference provided ample textual information about the various genocides, the exhibition was to be predominately non-textual with an emphasis on promoting visual understanding. The visual representation of genocide posed challenges to the curatorial team as we discussed the ethical quandaries in viewing the corpses of strangers, or images of people whose death was imminent. In Jonathan Moller's photographs, spectators may feel as though they are invited to take part in personal mourning ceremonies amongst community members. In *Burying the Remains* (Figure 9) viewers gaze upon a group of villagers from Nebaj, Quiché who gathered to bury the remains of fifteen people. In viewing *Mourners* (Figure 10) one is visually welcomed to join a group

gathered in 2001 at a church mass in Quiché, honoring the remains and memories of 120 murdered Guatemalan civilians. By accepting the invitation to look on, are we honoring the deceased through commemoration or voyeuristically gazing on the misfortune of unknown others? In the more grotesque images depicting skeletons lying in open cascades the ethical fragility of the image becomes heightened. In *The Remains of a Woman* (Figure 11) the camera angle points directly down towards the skeletal remains of a woman who, as Moller's accompanying text informs us, was killed by members of a paramilitary Civil Defense Patrol while she was hiding in the mountains. Two days after she was killed in September 1983, her husband and son were secretly buried near the village of Janlay, Nebaj, Quiché.

Numerous overarching questions guided the curatorial premise for the exhibition: are we better for viewing these images? How much text is required to guide the narrative of the visual? Is it important to mark the names of the victims in the photographs to help respect their individual lives? Or is the imagery meant to speak to the larger plight of collective struggles? In addressing Moller's work vis-à-vis the Children of Darfur drawings or the school children's letters from Rwanda to Markham, we discussed the appropriateness of the layout given the diverse demographic of the intended audience. The exhibition was created with the goal of inviting conference attendants, university students, and neighboring high school and elementary students for educational tours. In inviting the younger students into the environment, there was fear that the exhibition might not be an effective elementary educational model, as images of corpses might disturb young people. In dividing the exhibition layout, we wondered if there was risk in joining all the different genocides. Should they be divided geographically or historically?

Some feared the spectacle of the concept ‘Genocide’ could overshadow the specific socio-historic peculiarities that allowed for the respective violent outbreaks to occur? More trivial issues were discussed as conference organizers frantically realized that international guests would be arriving on opening night and eating at the exhibition gala, and no one wanted to look at corpses while they devoured food. While such a worry may seem petty, the dilemma highlighted the inconsistent nature of gala attendees enjoying themselves while visualizing the struggles of those much less fortunate. How was the imagery functioning? Were the images provoking a moral reaction or were they simply there to assert the gallery attendees’ own world luxuries by reflecting on those who have none? As the debates continued, one common thread carried the exhibition forward: the belief that visual testimony is vitally important in helping bring awareness to ongoing genocidal struggles and shape the memory and commemoration for deceased genocide victims. The question of how best to do that inspired this thesis, which grew out of an inquiry into the eventful journey of the S-21 images, which have been perennially used in North America since the 1970s to help shape the memory of the Cambodian genocide.

In contrast to Jonathan Moller’s photographs, or the Shoah archive of testimonies, exhibited in *Imagining the Unthinkable: L’exposition du genocide*, the S-21 images were not created by artists and researchers who employed visual imagery in order to commemorate the deceased. Instead, the photographs were integrated as vital components in helping execute the Khmer Rouge’s genocidal operation. In this sense, they are vital primary source evidential material testifying to brutal war crimes. Chapter One of this thesis draws on the scholarship of Australian historian David Chandler, as it examines the original context and use of the S-21 photographs at the Tuol Sleng prison.

Chandler has written extensively on the history of Cambodia in *A History of Cambodia* (1996), *Facing the Cambodian Past: Selected Essays, 1971-1994* (1996), and *Brother Number One: A Political Biography of Pol Pot* (1992). He builds on this previous body of work in his book *Voices From S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot's Secret Prison* (1999), which specifically addresses the Tuol Sleng torture facility. Between 1993 and 1998 Chandler studied over a thousand confessional texts created at the Tuol Sleng prison, and read all the administrative material housed in the Tuol Sleng archive. Chandler's close study of this material results in a thorough description of how the interrogations at the Tuol Sleng facility were structured, who the 'enemies' being held at the torture facility were, and how the torture was applied. Chandler interviewed a number of Tuol Sleng Survivors and workers including Vann Nath, Chey Saphon, Khieu Samon, and notably Nhem Ein, who defected from the Khmer Rouge in 1996, and has subsequently revealed himself as the person who took pictures under the supervision of Kang Keck Ieu (alias Duch), the commandant of S-21. The chapter examines the KR's desire to amass an extensive bureaucratic photographic archive by linking it to ideological underpinnings in the Stalinist Regime. It traces the trajectory of the images as they were installed at the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum by the Vietnamese upon conquest of the Democratic Kampuchea in 1979, and opened to an international audience to testify to the KR's ruthless practice. The chapter critiques the intervention politics proposed by two American photojournalists Douglas Niven, and Christopher Riley who formed the Photo Archive Group in March 1993 to rescue the endangered archive from dust-filled metal draws at Tuol Sleng. In 1993 Cornell University agreed to act as an umbrella organization for the project and the State of Cambodia Ministry of Culture approved the

proposal plan to clean, catalogue and print over 6000 negatives from the Tuol Sleng Archive. In June 2008, I visited the Archive of photographs transferred from Tuol Sleng to Cornell, where they are situated in the Echols Collection of Southeast Asia. The Cornell University Document Conservation Project intended to both preserve the originals and make microfilm copies of the documents at the Tuol Sleng Museum. Gregory Green, the current curator of the Echols Collection, and Elaine Engst, the Director and University Archivist at the Kroch Library at Cornell were very helpful in facilitating access to the extensive S-21 material which is presented in an archival format offering North American researchers insight into the systematic evidential use of the photographs within their original Tuol Sleng context. The chapter concludes by examining the new meaning of the photographs as they are used in the 2008 trial against former Khmer Rouge Leaders at the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia established as a joint entity under the Cambodian Government and the United Nations, which is often referred to as “The Khmer Rouge Tribunal”. By drawing on the scholarship of Shoshana Felman’s *The Judicial Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century* the thesis argues that the S-21 photographs provide a visual voice at the KR Tribunal and in addressing the past, the legal procedure attempts to repair historical trauma by giving expression to those history has rendered silent, becoming a critical juncture for collective remembrance.

The Photo Archive group’s involvement with the Tuol Sleng archive became controversial when they received rights to 100 selected images. Niven and Riley would subsequently offer the photographic images to various media outlets, art museum and publishers. In 1996 art and photography publishers Twin Palms printed seventy-eight of

the individual portrait prints in a high quality book entitled *The Killing Fields*. The Museum of Modern Art purchased eight of the prints, and exhibited twenty-two of the portraits in the 1997 exhibition *Photographs from S-21: 1975-1979*. The selection criteria Niven and Riley used to choose which S-21 photographs to privilege for display was scrutinized by critics who questioned the aesthetic grounds which potentially influenced their decision. In May 2008, I conducted an interview with Susan Kismaric, curator of the Museum of Modern Art's photography department, which addressed the curatorial premise of the 1997 exhibition *Photographs from S-21*, and the risks of overly aestheticizing the S-21 imagery. In our interview, we discussed the blurring of photographic genre seen at the turn of the twenty-first century whereby photojournalistic work, art photography, and documentary photography are coming to resemble each other. Kismaric defended the exhibition arguing that there was a precedent for such a curatorial approach as seen in the 1995 MoMA exhibition *The Silence: Photographs by Gilles Peress*, which shows his documentary shots of the Rwandan Massacres. Chapter Two of this thesis draws on the outcomes of this interview as it critically examines the use of the S-21 exhibition within a Western modern art museum context.

Photographs from S:21 was extended into a travelling exhibition, which included 100 of the prisoner portraits entitled *Facing Death: Portraits from Cambodia's Killing Fields*. The exhibit, which was organized by the Photographic Resource Center at Boston University in collaboration with the Photo Archive Group was shown at the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography in 2000. The CMCP curatorial staff decided that, in order to address the sensitive imagery, they would create a concurrent exhibition entitled *The Space of Silence*, which would speak to the remembrance of

genocide through the photographic work of three artists, Isaac Applebaum, Jack Burman and Alfredo Jaar. In June 2008, I interviewed Carol Payne, who was then associate curator at the CMCP. Payne, who proposed to include the exhibition in the program, explained that it is part of the CMCP's institutional mandate to study the history of photography, and that, although the S-21 photographs are not artistic works, they are very much a part of the medium's dense history. The decision to interview curators Susan Kismaric and Carol Payne, rather than the artists involved in the *Space of Silence* exhibition, stemmed from a desire to examine the use of the S-21 images within institutional practice. This critical framework could allow for an in-depth critique of curatorial ethics and public reception, rather than the focus on artists' intentions. Chapter Three addresses the CMCP exhibitions *Facing Death: Portraits from Cambodia's Killing Fields* and *The Space of Silence*, as it critiques various photographic approaches to addressing the remembrance of genocide, and explores the challenges the S-21 photographic images pose to art criticism and photographic historicism.

CHAPTER ONE

The S-21 Archive of Photographs

One of the defining characteristic of the modern era has been the increasing significance given to the archive as the means by which historical knowledge and forms of remembrance are accumulated, stored and recovered.

Charles Merewether, *The Archive; Documents of Contemporary Art*⁵

The S-21 archive of photographs taken by Khmer Rouge officials of Tuol Sleng prisoners prior to their execution provides one of the most gruesome, daunting, and meticulous uses of the photographic medium in the twentieth century. This chapter will analyze the means by which the S-21 photographs were initially created at the Tuol Sleng torture facility where between the years of 1974, and 1979, thousands of photographs were taken of innocent victims, woman, men, the elderly and children in the moments before they were executed by the KR Marxist-Stalinist bureaucratic regime. It will trace the trajectory of the photographic archive since the Vietnamese conquest of the Democratic Kampuchea in 1979, and subsequent installation of the archive at the Tuol Sleng Museum. The chapter will outline the shifting meaning of the archive as it was dislocated from its original location in Phnom Penh and brought to North America through the auspices of Cornell University and the direction of two American photojournalists, Christopher Riley, and Douglas Niven. In conclusion, the chapter will explore the new meaning attributed to the S-21 photographs through the process of an

⁵ Charles Merewether, introduction to *The Archive; Documents of Contemporary Art*, by Charles Merewether (London: Whitechapel Ventures Limited, 2006),10.

international tribunal, as they provide a visual voice to those who history has rendered silent.

Allan Sekula has argued in “Reading an Archive” that “photographic archives by their very structure maintain a hidden connection between knowledge and power.”⁶ The KR regime produced the S-21 photographic archive with the malicious intent of asserting a tyrannical form of power over its population. The photographs were taken systematically at the Tuol Sleng prison, which existed as a central organization defending the Party center under the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK), which saw a radical transformation of Cambodian society under the Khmer Rouge Regime. On April 17, 1975, the Khmer Rouge army seized control of Cambodia’s capital, Phnom Penh, forcing all citizens to surrender to their meticulous control. Under the rule of Pol Pot’s leadership Cambodia would undergo a four-year genocide, killing an estimated 2 million people.⁷ During his time in power Pol Pot imposed a version of agrarian collectivization conceived as a restarting of civilization in “Year Zero”, whereby city dwellers were relocated to the countryside to work in collective farms and forced labour projects. Under the regime approximately one quarter of the Cambodian population would die due to slave labour, malnutrition, poor medical care and executions.

The distressing nature of the S-21 photographic archive is that the ‘criminal’ mug shots depict innocent individuals who were to be cruelly murdered within the unruly KR government. Relative to Pol Pot’s tyrannical ideology (Figure 12), any citizen who

⁶ Allan Sekula, “Reading an Archive,” in *Blasted Allegories: An Anthology of Writings by Contemporary Artists*, Ed. Brian Wallis (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1987), 119.

⁷ Howard Ball, *Prosecuting War Crimes and Genocide: The Twentieth-Century Experience* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999), 95.

threatened their communist, classless ideal was targeted as the ‘criminal’. Historian David Chandler explains,

Using the words “guilty” or “innocent” to describe the prisoners at S-21 is misleading. Using these words lends judicial legitimacy to a macabre project whereby all the prisoners, regardless of their actions and before they started talking were condemned to death.⁸

In an interview with Ben Kiernan, a renowned researcher on Cambodia’s political history, a Cham villager explains the oppressive nature of the ruthless KR regime “There were no laws. If they wanted us to walk, we walked; to sit, we sat to eat, we ate. And still they killed us. It was just that if they wanted to kill us, they would take us off and kill us.”⁹ (Figure 13)

Survivor of the Cambodian Genocide, Teeda Butt Mam, who was fifteen at the time the Khmer Rouge forces came to power in 1975, describes the nature of the ‘criminal’ enemy constructed by the regime,

The city people were the enemy, and the list was long. Former soldiers, the police, the CIA, and the KGM. Their crime was fighting in the civil war. The merchants, the capitalists, and the businessmen. Their crime was exploiting the poor. The rich farmers and the landlords. Their crime was exploiting the

⁸ David P. Chandler, *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot’s Secret Prison* (California: University of California Press, 1999), 48.

⁹ Adam Jones, *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 195.

peasants. The intellectuals, the doctors, the lawyers, the monks, the teachers, and the civil servants....The list goes on and on.¹⁰

Mam explains that “Very few of us escaped these categories.”¹¹ The photographs taken by the KR officials at the Tuol Sleng prison represented these categories of ‘enemies’.

The S-21 facility’s mission was to protect the Party center by killing all the prisoners that were deemed suspicious to the Party.¹² The “s” stood for sala or “hall”, while “21” was the code number assigned to *santebal*, a Khmer compound term that combined the words *santisuk* (security) and *nokorbal* (police). “S-21,” and *santebal* were names for DK’s security police, or special branch (Figure 14).¹³ In the 1960s when Cambodia was ruled by Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the site functioned as a high school named after the Cambodia King, Ponhea Yat, who was associated with Phnom Penh’s foundation.¹⁴ After Cambodia’s civil war began in 1970 and Sihanouk was overthrown, the school took the name of the surrounding area, Tuol Svay Prey, which means the hillock of the wild mango. David Chandler has determined that the code name S-21 began to appear on Khmer Rouge documents in September 1975. In June 1976 Kang Keck Ieu (alias Duch), a former school teacher, became the director of the Tuol Sleng

¹⁰ Dath Pran, *Children of Cambodia’s Killing Fields: Memories by Survivors* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 13.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² David P. Chandler, *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot’s Secret Prison* (California: University of California Press, 1999), 15.

¹³ Ibid,3.

¹⁴ Ibid,4.

facility, remaining in command until the close of the torture facility with the Vietnamese arrival.¹⁵

The facility functioned as an interrogation and torture house where people under suspicion were confined and punished, never to be released. Prisoners were considered guilty from the moment they arrived, and the inmates were expected to confess their guilt in writing before they were killed.¹⁶ All of the prisoners in S-21, with a handful of exceptions, were killed not only because of their alleged guilt but also because of the existence of the prison, which needed to remain secret. In an interview given in 1989, a factor worker in a nearby compound referred to S-21 as “the place where people went in but never came out.”¹⁷ Only seven prisoners who entered S-21 are known to have survived, one of which was Ian Cha who remained alive in the Tuol Sleng prison by carving effigies of Pol Pot. Cha was convinced that he would die but explained that “they knew if they treated me badly they would not get their statues.”¹⁸ Similarly, Van Nath remained alive by continuously painting portraits based on photographs of Pol Pot’s face.¹⁹ Prisoners like Ian Cha, and Van Nath were brought to S-21 for many reasons: because they had been named in other confessions, because their unit commanders were suspected of being ‘enemies’ or because they had come under the suspicion of security services.²⁰ S-21 had three main units: interrogation, documentation, and defense. A photography sub-unit operated within the documentation unit, which chronicled the

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid,6.

¹⁷ Ibid,7.

¹⁸ Peter Maguire, *Facing Death in Cambodia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 27.

¹⁹ Paul Williams, “Witnessing Genocide: Vigilance and Remembrance at Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 18 (2004): 239.

²⁰ David P. Chandler, *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot’s Secret Prison* (California: University of California Press, 1999), 15.

existence of the prisoners in a taxonomic manner preceding their execution.²¹ Upon entering the photography sub-unit the inmates were blindfolded. Seconds after the blindfolds were ripped off, a young photographer, Nhem Ein, would take a mug shot style portrait of them. Nhem Ein was a peasant boy from Kompong Cham who joined the Khmer Rouge forces in 1970, when he was ten years old. He was selected to study photography in China in 1975 and 1976 and because of his photography expertise, he was selected to work at S-21.²² Ein was young at the time of the Cambodian genocidal campaign, and he remembers his own youthful fearfulness of the regime's gruesome practice,

What made me really scared was when I saw the trucks loaded with people and they shoved the people off the trucks and then pushed them when they hit the ground. I was still young and it scared me. These people were blindfolded and their hands were tied behind them.²³

Ein recalls the victims asking "Why was I brought here? What am I accused of? What did I do wrong?"²⁴ Fearful for his own life, he meticulously performed his duty as photographer responding to the inmate's questions by directing them to, "Look straight ahead. Don't lean your head to the left or the right..." ensuring that the picture "would turn out okay."²⁵ According to Ein, it didn't take long for the horror to become a routine.

²¹ Ibid,17.

²² Ibid,28.

²³ Ibid,139.

²⁴ Seth Mydans, "Out from Behind a Camera at a Khmer Torture House," *New York Times*, October 26, 2007, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9805E1DA1231F934A15753C1A9619C8B63&scp=1&sq=out+from+behind+the+camera&st=nym> (accessed September 6, 2008).

²⁵ Ibid.

He explains, “When I first got at Tuol Sleng I was scared, but after seeing the same thing every day, I got used to it. It became normal, like feeling numb.”²⁶

The passport-sized photographs and completed confessions were then submitted to the DK authorities as evidence that the targeted ‘enemies of the DK’ had been executed.²⁷ (Figure 15) At S-21 Ein worked in a small studio space with several other assistant photographers. The photography team received direct orders from the Khmer Rouge Interior Minister Son Sen and prison commandant Brother Duch.²⁸ The team executed a systemic process of numbering the victims chronologically, which began anew every twenty four hours. Ein explains the process to Peter Maguire:

My assistants were Ry, Sam, Nith, Song, and Srieng. We set up the numbers every 24 hours. For example, if we had ten prisoners today we would start from one to ten, and tomorrow if we had 1,500 prisoners we would start with one and go up to 1,500. The period was from seven a.m. until midnight.²⁹

This well-organized process helped define the regime’s rigid oppression, as Rachel Hughes explains the S-21 “photographs were, for both prisoners and their masters emblems of the regime’s omnipotence and efficiency.”³⁰

With the intent of creating material proof testifying to their historical dominance, the KR command created the exhaustive photographic archive reflecting the execution of

²⁶ Peter Maguire, *Facing Death in Cambodia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), P 121.

²⁷ Paul Williams, “Witnessing Genocide: Vigilance and Remembrance at Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 18 (2004): 237.

²⁸ Peter Maguire, *Facing Death in Cambodia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 120.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Rachel Hughes, “The Abject Artifacts of Memory: Photographs from Cambodia’s Genocide,” *Media Culture, and Society* 25 (2003): 25.

thousands of innocent prisoners. The judicial system in Cambodia was non-existent after April 17, 1975, when the Khmer Rouge came to power. The absence of laws allowed for Kang Keck Ieu (Duch), the commandant at the Tuol Sleng prison throughout its operation, and his associates to use torture to obtain confessions. Torture methods that historian David Chandler derived from S-21 archival material used at the prison were beatings (by hand, with a heavy stick, with branches, with bunches of electric wire), cigarette burns, electric shock. Inmates were forced to eat excrement and to drink urine, and they were suffocated with plastic bags.³¹ Nhem Ein recalls “lots of screaming, especially at night, when there was no noise in Phnom Penh. The cries were so loud that we could hear them from half a mile away.”³² Likewise the former guard Khieu Lohr told Alexander Hinton that he “could hear screams, but no words. Sometimes everything went quiet.”³³ Survivor of the Cambodian Genocide, Ian Chan, told Peter Maguire author of *Facing Death in Cambodia* in the 1990s that he still “feels in his head”³⁴ the residual effects of the electric shock. Chan explains that the prisoner workers repeatedly tortured and interrogate him until he confessed to a crime. For twenty six days he was repetitively asked “Do you work for the CIA? Do you work for the KGB?”³⁵

The overarching question regarding the Tuol Sleng interrogation process is why would the Khmer Rouge forces use such a meticulous process of interrogation, which included the lengthy and expensive procedure of photographing inmates prior their execution if one was going to be killed regardless of their allegation? Historian David

³¹ David P. Chandler, *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot's Secret Prison* (California: University of California Press, 1999), 130.

³² *Ibid.*, 128.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Peter Maguire, *Facing Death in Cambodia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 27.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Chandler has argued that the Toul Sleng “archive was assembled to provide the Party Center with raw material for a massive, unwritten history of the Party.”³⁶ Given Pol Pot’s emphasis on erasing prior history and initiating his regime with the “year zero” this interpretation offers a clear explanation as to why the KR regime accumulated this vast photographic archive. Curator, social activist, and artist Jayce Salloum has written that,

To amass an archive is a leap of faith, not in preservation but in the belief that there will be someone to use it, that the accumulation of these histories will continue to live, that they will have listeners.³⁷

The KR Leaders were consciously creating the S-21 archive with an understanding and hope that the material traces of their regime would help to narrate the success of their command. As David Chandler explains, “because everyone held at S-21 was eventually ‘smashed,’ their confessions would testify not only to their crimes but also to the Party’s power and the omniscience.”³⁸

The KR’s desire to nullify prior history and assert their own command through an oppressive bureaucratic structure had ideological underpinnings in the Stalinist regime, which many of KR commanders studied in France. In the 1950s many of the leaders of what would become the tyrannical KR organization benefitted from academic

³⁶ David P. Chandler, *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot’s Secret Prison* (California: University of California Press, 1999), 50. David Chandler was offered this explanation by Steve Heder who had previously researched the S-21 archive.

³⁷ Jayce Salloum. “Sans titre/Untitled: The Video Installation as an Active Archive.” in *The Archive: Documents of Contemporary Art*, ed. Charles Merewether (London: Whitechapel Ventures Limited, 2006), 186.

³⁸ David P. Chandler, *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot’s Secret Prison* (California: University of California Press, 1999), 50.

scholarships which were being awarded by France to help Cambodians study in Paris.³⁹ Those who studied in Paris in the 1950s included Saloth Sar, (who subsequently took the name Pol Pot, “Brother Number One”) and became Prime Minister of Democratic Kampuchea during the KR’s period in power; Khieu Samphan, later President of Democratic Kampuchea (DK); Son Sen, DK’s deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense and Security; Ieng Sary, deputy Prime Minister in charge of foreign affairs during the DK period, and his wife, Ieng (Khieu) Thirith, Minister of Social Action for the DK regime. In the 1950s the French Communist Party was in its high-Stalinist phase, supporting campaigns against “enemies of the people.”⁴⁰ The young KR leaders who were supporters of the French Communist Party would have read Party documents, briefings and publications, such as *The History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, which outlines Stalin’s triumph over the Party’s internal enemies.⁴¹ There are distinct similarities between the S-21 atrocities to the Moscow show trials, also referred to as the Great Terror of 1936-1938. In the Moscow trials, hundreds of Soviet Communist Party cadres and military figures that opposed Stalin were interrogated, and put through judicial torture, leading to confessions akin to the S-21 prisoner confessions. The interrogation process in Moscow was intended to assert Stalin’s power, as in the case of the S-21 archive for Pol Pot, and confirm the Communist regime’s targeted ‘enemies’. David Chandler believes that,

³⁹ Adam Jones, *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 186.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 187.

⁴¹ David P. Chandler, *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot’s Secret Prison* (California: University of California Press, 1999), 50.

The confessions extracted at S-21 replicated the paranoid ideology, the holistic, accusatory format, and the interrogatory procedures of the Soviet show trials. Since in both cases a Communist Party, obsessed with history, was purging itself to protect its suspicious leaders, the resemblances are not surprising.⁴²

In addition to the secret and concealed S-21 images produced at Tuol Sleng, Nhem Ein created propaganda photographs⁴³ to be shared with the Cambodian population, with the intent of glorifying and spreading the KR's revolutionary ideology. These propagandistic photographs were modeled after the Soviet Union's notorious propaganda images helping to glorify the proletariat and Stalin's power. In the years of the first Five-Year Plans (1928-1932) *Sovetskoe Foto*, a leading photographic journal in the Soviet Union at that time, "identified photography as a radical medium with an urgent political agenda and close contact with the productive forces of the proletariat."⁴⁴ An example of the political might attributed to the photograph can be seen in a page from *Sovetskoe Foto*, which displays a photograph of a steelworker with the following statement: "In the USSR photography is one of the weapons of the class struggle and of socialist construction"⁴⁵ The successful utilization of the photographic medium as a political tool inspired a new type of photographic symbolism helping to glorify the figure of Stalin. Margarita Tupitsyn explains:

⁴² Ibid, 124.

⁴³ Carol Payne, "Unbearable Witness," *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 163, no. 9 (2000), <http://www.cmaj.ca/cgi/content/full/163/9/1176-a>, 1178.

⁴⁴ Margarita Tupitsyn. "Against the Camera, For the Photographic Archive" in *The Archive; Documents of Contemporary Art*, ed. Charles Merewether (London: Whitechapel Ventures Limited, 2006), 103.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

With the successful completion of the first Five-Year Plan, photographic imagery began to acquire new meaning, shifting from promoting the proletariat to glorifying Stalin as the main force behind successful socialist revolution. The worker's image was gradually overshadowed by that of Stalin.⁴⁶

Like Stalin, Pol Pot continuously employed the photographic medium for propaganda purposes, helping to project an idealized image of the peasant communist revolution, and glorify himself. Ben Kiernan explains the rise of Pol Pot's communist revolution in *How Pol Pot Came to Power*,

As the Kampuchean civil war dragged on through 1974 and into 1975, the CPK leaders, headed by Pol Pot, strengthened their hold over the communist movement, and this enabled them, upon victory, to carry out one of the greatest forced population movements of modern times- the evacuation of the countryside of the two million inhabitants of Phnom Penh.⁴⁷

Two propaganda photographs taken of Khmer Rouge leaders guiding groups of peasant farmers provide vivid examples of the means by which the KR regime utilized the camera for political control by helping to sell their communist ideal (Figure 16 and Figure 17). The importance of portraying Pol Pot in a favorable light through the photographic medium is disclosed through Ein's recollection of an event that occurred when he was photographing Pol Pot during his October 1977 visit to China. Ein recalled twenty years after the event that one of his photographs developed presented Pol Pot with

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power: Colonialism, Nationalism, and Communism in Cambodia, 1930-1975*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004, xviii.

an unseemly blotch on one eye.⁴⁸ Consequently, Ein was deployed to a work camp at Pray So where he feared for his life as he obeyed orders to pick water spinach. One and a half months later, when the rest of the film produced spotted negatives proving it was the film that was faulted, Ein was exonerated from intentionally deforming “brother number one” and was ordered back to his job at S-21.⁴⁹ When Ein returned to S-21 where he would continue to take mug shot photographs of prisoners when they arrived, prisoners who died in captivity, and pictures of important prisoners after they were killed.⁵⁰

How successful was the DK regime in employing the photographic archive to narrate their historical dominance? The notion of creating a comprehensive historical archive through the photographic medium is an encyclopedic venture which can never be fully manifested. Foucault has argued, “It is obvious that the archive of a society, a culture or a civilization cannot be described exhaustively; or even, no doubt the archive of a whole period.”⁵¹ The unknown information left outside of the S-21 photographic images are limitless. How did the photographed individuals at Tuol Sleng differ from those who were murdered in the killing fields without being photographed? What biographical information can the photographs offer about the lives captured in the mug shots? Why were some individuals taken to S-21 not photographed? Visual remains of countless prisoners at Tuol Sleng do not exist. David Chandler reports that the number of prisoners at S-21 varied, with the maximum capacity being reached in 1977 with 1,500

⁴⁸ David P. Chandler, *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot's Secret Prison* (California: University of California Press, 1999), 28.

⁴⁹ Peter Maguire, *Facing Death in Cambodia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 120.

⁵⁰ David P. Chandler, *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot's Secret Prison* (California: University of California Press, 1999), 26.

⁵¹ Michel Foucault “The Historical a priori and the Archive” in *The Archive; Documents of Contemporary Art*, ed. Charles Merewether (London: Whitechapel Ventures Limited, 2006), 29.

prisoners. Chandler speculates that it was probably in this period that Nhem Ein recalls seeing truckloads of prisoners arrive at S-21, who were taken off almost immediately to be killed, without being photographed or interrogated.⁵²

Allan Sekula has written in “The Body and the Archive” that “The photographic archive’s components” are limited as it is “subject to the circumstantial character of all that is photographable.”⁵³ The number of undocumented murders which occurred throughout Cambodia during the period of 1974 -1979 which were not captured on camera is immeasurable. While an endless quantity of historical knowledge exists outside the S-21 photographic archive, the Tuol Sleng photographs do remain the most vital visual evidence of the KR period, and consequently they have been employed as emblems on an international scale helping to narrate the atrocities of the Cambodian Genocide.

Historian Pierre Nora believes that “modern memory is, above all, archival. It relies entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image.”⁵⁴ The importance of the S-21 archive of photographs as material vehicles helping shape the historical memory of the Cambodian atrocity was quickly realized by the Vietnamese upon conquer of the Khmer Rouge in January 1979. Two Vietnamese photojournalists entered the Tuol Sleng compound with the troops finding what historian Paul Williams describes as “wire beds in the classrooms [where] lay some fifty recently deceased bodies. Blood not yet dried covered the walls, and grisly torture

⁵² David Chandler, *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot's Secret Prison* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1999), 36.

⁵³ Allan Sekula, “The Body and the Archive,” *October*, Vol. 39 (1986): 17.

⁵⁴ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire”, *Representations*, No. 26 (Spring, 1989): 13.

instruments were strewn beside the corpses.”⁵⁵ (Figure 18) The Vietnamese would issue a proper investigation on the site gathering “piles of documentation abandoned by the fleeing KR, including international memorandums, cadre notebooks, prisoner inventories, photographic negatives, and scores of personal confessions.”⁵⁶ The archive was in disarray, and the personal confessions no longer attached to their respective portraits, causing many of the photographs to remain unidentifiable.

Recognizing the magnitude of reconstructing the S-21 site, Vietnamese authorities recruited Mai Lam, a Vietnamese colonel and museologist to archive the documents and turn the facility into a museum.⁵⁷ Mai Lam, who had previously helped to create the Museum of American WAR Crimes in Ho Chi Minh City, viewed it as his “duty” to provide proof of the DK crimes through the museum, and educate the Cambodia people about their collective violent past ensuring that they remember what happened under “the contemptible Pot.”⁵⁸ In an interview given to Sara Colm in 1995 Lam explains that,

The Tuol Sleng Museum is for the Cambodian people to help them study the war and many aspects of war crimes... Even though they suffered from the regime, as a researcher I want them to go [to the museum]. Even though it

⁵⁵ Paul Williams, “Witnessing Genocide: Vigilance and Remembrance at Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 18 (2004): 237.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Paul Williams, “Witnessing Genocide: Vigilance and Remembrance at Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 18 (2004): 237.

⁵⁸ David Chandler, *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot's Secret Prison* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1999), 8.

makes them cry...The Cambodian people who suffered the war could not understand the war – and the new generation also cannot understand.⁵⁹

Mai Lam used the S-21 photographs in the Tuol Sleng Museum as visual aids helping narrate the historical atrocity. The S-21 photographs were blown up and presented prominently on the main floor of building two in the museum. (Figure 19) Historian Judy Ledgerwood describes the space,

Three walls of the first room are covered with photos of the people who died at Tuol Sleng. Displayed prominently opposite the doorway are the photos of a dozen or so foreigners who died there. From this room you enter a second room of photos, and then a third. From a distance, across the room the images are squares of black on white, six squares by six squares, thirty-six people per block, ten blocks per section, three hundred and sixty squares. As you walk closer, they become disguisable as individual people, with expressions: a frown, a smirk, bewilderment, anger, shock, withdraw, fear, most often fear. Most of these photos were taken in a standardized form as a bureaucratic act of record; others are of people taken as they were undergoing torture, or in death.⁶⁰

The prisoner photographs appear eerily and endlessly throughout the Tuol Sleng Museum offering visual confirmation to survivors of deceased individuals. They would be exhibited alongside remains of skulls of the many

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Judy Ledgerwood, “The Cambodian Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocidal Crimes: National Narrative” in *Genocide, Collective Violence, and Popular Memory: The Politics of Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, Ed. David E. Lorey, and William H. Beezley, (Wilmington, Delaware: SR Books, 2002), 105.

victims, most notably in the infamous "skull map", which was composed of 300 skulls and other bones found by the Vietnamese during their occupation of Cambodia (Figure 20). The map was dismantled in 2002 due to cultural concerns regarding treatment of the deceased,⁶¹ but the skulls of some victims still remain on display in shelves in the museum alongside the installation of the S-21 portraits, in order to serve as a reminder of what happened at the prison. Rachel Hughes describes the installation of thousands of the S-21 photographs which are hung in Building B of the Museum compound:

The prisoner 'mug-shot' photographs now occupy the entire ground floor of Building B – exhibited in banks of hundreds of faces. Some portraits are well-known individuals of pre-1975 Cambodia have been enlarged and hung individually, other portraits are grouped in 'family' series to illustrate the commitment of the Khmer Rouge to the total liquidation of the bourgeoisie, including their potentially vengeful progeny.⁶²

In March 1979, before the Tuol Sleng museum had formally opened, public tours of the site were given to foreigners, mostly members of fraternal socialist parties from abroad, to help expose the extent of the Khmer Rouge genocidal campaign. A 1980 report from the Ministry of Culture, Information, and Propaganda explains the intention of the museum "to show ...international guests the cruel torture committed by the traitors to the

⁶¹ Cambodia Skull Map Dismantled. CNN March 10, 2002. <http://archives.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/asiapcf/southeast/03/10/cambodia.skulls/index.html> (accessed, October, 2008).

⁶² Rachel Hughes, "The improper place of objects: affective and sovereign objects in interstices." *Memory, History, Nation: Contested Pasts*, Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, eds. New York: Routledge, (2003), 182.

Khmer people.”⁶³ The museum utilized the S-21 photographs as material proof testifying to the crimes of the KR regime helping viewers visualize the cruel murders. Museum attendees were invited to stare at the faces of the innocent victims who jarringly stared back producing an unnerving quality, which ensured that viewers literally confronted the victims of brutal murders. Paul Williams notes that in the Museum,

The illusion that viewers gain an unobstructed window on death is partly due to the photographs’ unique nature as both image and objects. The pictures are not just secondary representations of history but primary evidence from it.⁶⁴

The institutional structure of the Tuol Sleng Museum helped legitimize the evidential value of the S-21 photographs. Historian Rachel Hughes believes that,

The installation of the prisoner portraits at Tuol Sleng Museum and archive marked the beginning of their consideration as institutional materials capable of evidencing genocide, drawing audiences from further afield than Phnom Penh.⁶⁵

The evidential quality of the photographs became apparent in July 1980 when the Tuol Sleng museum formally opened to the public, and was soon visited by thousands of Cambodians who were desperately seeking information about lost family members. Thirty-two thousand people were reported to have visited the museum within its first week open to the public, many of whom consulted the S-21

⁶³ David Chandler, *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot’s Secret Prison* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1999), 8.

⁶⁴ Paul Williams, “Witnessing Genocide: Vigilance and Remembrance at Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 18 (2004): 245.

⁶⁵ Rachel Hughes. “The Abject Artifacts of Memory: Photographs from Cambodia’s Genocide,” *Media Culture, and Society* 25 (2003): 25.

photographs to help identify murdered family members.⁶⁶ Judy Ledgerwood explains that visitors attending the museum were “searching for meaning, for some explanation of what happened. A visit would not have been an easy task; people who went through the museum in the first year said that the stench of the place was overwhelming.”⁶⁷

Susan Sontag has argued in *Regarding the Pain of Others* that in the twentieth century “photographs of genocide have undergone the greatest institutional development.”⁶⁸ Photographs are placed into what she calls the “memory museum” which aids the process of mourning. Sontag states that,

People want to be able to revisit and refresh their memories. Now many people want a memory museum, a temple that houses a comprehensive, chronologically organized, illustrated narrative of their sufferings.⁶⁹

The Tuol Sleng Museum functions as a memory museum whereby the Cambodian people are able to revisit the historical atrocities they endured and the S-21 photographs are utilized as powerful tools helping to shape their memory. Barbie Zelizer explains the role of photographs “as vehicles of memory.”⁷⁰ The denotative force of the photograph, which connects it to a real world event makes it a powerful testament triggering remembrance.

⁶⁶ David Chandler, *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot's Secret Prison* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1999), 8.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003), 86.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 87.

⁷⁰ Barbie Zelizer “The Voice of the Visual in Memory.” In *Framing Public Memory*, ed. Kendall R. Phillips (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 160.

Zelizer explains,

The force of the photographic image is derived from its powerful capacity to represent the real. Often photography aids the recall of things and events past so effectively that photographs become the primary markers of memory itself.⁷¹

In addition to the denotative force, photographic imagery entails a connotative strength which invokes a symbolic meaning, making the image a generalized and universal representation. Zelizer explains that photographs “move the atrocity story from the contingent and particular to the symbolic and abstract.”⁷² In this sense, the S-21 photographs reach beyond the particular event they represent, the murder of an innocent individual, and become visual symbols evoking the remembrance of Cambodia’s entire genocide.

David E. Lorey, and William H. Beezley authors of *Genocide, Collective Violence and Popular Memory* emphasize the importance of symbols, ritual, and language within public spaces in coming to terms with episodes of collective violence in forming what they call a “cultural history of remembering.”⁷³ The S-21 photographs displayed at the Tuol Sleng Museum become emblems forming the cultural history of remembrance for Cambodian society and in doing so facilitate national reconciliation. The process of remembrance through the photographic narrative helps those who have suffered protest future atrocity. As Lorey and Beezley state “The [Tuol Sleng] museum

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 85.

⁷³ David E. Lorey, and William H. Beezley, introduction to *Genocide, Collective Violence, and Popular Memory: The Politics of Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, Ed. David E. Lorey, and William H. Beezley, (Wilmington, Delaware: SR Books, 2002), xv.

replays both the violence and the human face of those who suffered, standing at the same time as a memorial and a symbolic deterrent to future violence.”⁷⁴ The symbolic function of the photographs became internationally recognized as worldwide researchers were invited to witness the photographs at the Museum, and incorporate the visual testimonies into their historical analysis of Cambodia’s political landscape under the Khmer Rouge. Jacques Derrida has stated that “Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation.”⁷⁵ The open access to the archive marked a political shift in Cambodia, representing a desire for national remorse, and condemnation of the KR reign. Rachel Hughes confirms that,

The [Tuol Sleng] archive was held by various groups to indicate the general political openness (or otherwise) of the new government, and importantly its willingness to investigate and memorialize the past.⁷⁶

The compliance of the Cambodian government to facilitate access to the archive became apparent in the early 1990s when the Minister of Culture’s jurisdiction granted permission and assistance to Cornell University, which is renowned for its Southeast Asian library holdings, to catalogue and microfilm the S-21 archive. Cornell University initiated a Document Conservation Project which intended to both preserve the originals and to make microfilm copies of the documents at the Tuol Sleng Museum. In her

⁷⁴ David E. Lorey, and William H. Beezley, introduction to *Genocide, Collective Violence, and Popular Memory: The Politics of Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, Ed. David E. Lorey, and William H. Beezley, (Wilmington, Delaware: SR Books, 2002), xxiv.

⁷⁵ Jacques Derrida, “Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression.”trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995):4 (note 1).

⁷⁶ Rachel Hughes. “The Abject Artifacts of Memory: Photographs from Cambodia’s Genocide,” *Media Culture, and Society* 25 (2003): 26.

capacity as project director for the Cornell University Document Conservation Project, Cultural anthropologist, Judy Ledgerwood, worked at the Tuol Sleng Museum for five months in 1990 to 1991, helping to oversee the conservation of documents and microfilm the archival material. Ledgerwood describes the powerful role the S-21 photographs played in aiding Cambodians to understand the horrific violence of their modern history.

Ledgerwood explains,

As we worked in the archive, tour groups would wind through the complex ever day, taking pictures, speaking in muffled tones. Khmer from overseas would visit, looking through the pictures for relatives missing then for nearly twenty years. On a few occasions people would come to the archive hoping to find any word on the fate of a loved one, even the knowledge that they had been tortured into producing one of the extant confessions.⁷⁷

Judy Ledgerwood, John Marston and Lya Badgley supervised the microfilming project at different times completing the job in two years.⁷⁸ David Chandler describes the contents of microfilm which amounted to 210 reels of film, including eleven reels of retakes.

The reels contain all the confession texts ordered at the site, including those by foreign prisoners (filmed on separate reels). Foreigners' confessions were primarily those of Vietnamese fishermen, some Vietnamese civilians, and a

⁷⁷ Judy Ledgerwood, "The Cambodian Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocidal Crimes: National Narrative," *Museum Anthropology* Vol. 21, No. 1(1997): 5.

⁷⁸ David Chandler, *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot's Secret Prison* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1999), ix.

handful of American, British, and Australian sailors who were arrested when their boats steered too near the Cambodian coast.⁷⁹

The microfilmed confessions include extensive material about the interrogation process. In conjunction, the microfilmed reels reproduced an assortment of non-confessional materials found at the prison including entry and execution records, military unit and government office notebooks, speeches and copies of the DK's theoretical journals, *Revolutionary Flags (Tung Padevat)* and *Revolutionary Youth*, distributed to the Party Members.⁸⁰ While the Cornell Project was extensive, it initially did not include the microfilmed copy of the photographic material held in the archive.⁸¹ Historian Rachel Hughes believes that the main reason for this omission was that in the early 1980s political activist David Hawk had created backup negatives of the photographic archive, which he would later donate to Cornell.⁸² David Hawk went to Cambodia in the wake of the Vietnamese invasion, which allowed for foreign scholars to come and disclose the Khmer Rouge violence. Hawk explains,

Following the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1978, which drove the Khmer Rouge from the capitol of Phnom Penh to the mountainous jungles on the Thai-Cambodian border, and the famine of 1980-1981, Cambodia reopened to foreign relief officials, journalists, and scholars. Vastly more information and

⁷⁹ Ibid, 11.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Rachel Hughes. "The Abject Artifacts of Memory: Photographs from Cambodia's Genocide," *Media Culture, and Society* 25 (2003): 27.

⁸² Ibid.

evidence became available and is now possible to document in detail the extreme human rights violations of the Khmer Rouge.⁸³

The John M. Echols Collection on Southeast Asia at Cornell University would acquire the collection from David Hawk in two installments. The first occurred on June 11, 1985 when eight boxes of black and white photographic contact sheets were submitted. Each image sheet represented a roll of film (Figure 21).⁸⁴ The second donation occurred on October 25, 1991 when Dr. John Badgley, who was the curator of the Echols collection, oversaw the reception of extensive photographic material relating to “S-21” (Tuol Sleng).⁸⁵ The microfilm format presents the images in repetitive rows allowing viewers to witness the uniformity and efficiency of the KR’s oppressive bureaucratic scheme. (Figure 21)

At Cornell University, the S-21 photographs enter a new archival structure, that of a library, attributing new cultural, political and social dimensions shaping their meaning. Within the Echols Collection on South East Asia, the photographs are not being asked to help identify family members or aid Cambodia’s national reconciliation. The photographs are being employed to aid North American scholars recount an authoritative narration of the Cambodian genocide, and testify to the cruelty of the KR political regime. Gregory Green, current curator of the Echols Collection, explains that the photographs are housed

⁸³ David Hawk, "The Photographic Record," *Cambodia, 1975-1978: Rendezvous with Death*, Karl D. Jackson, ed. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1992), 209.

⁸⁴ John M. Echols Collection on Southeast Asia, Cornell University Library Acquisition Records, dated June 17th, 1985.

⁸⁵ John M. Echols Collection on Southeast Asia, Cornell University Library Acquisition Records, dated October 25th, 1991. The library received strips of negatives film (6 frames to a strip), 11 boxes of Oversize (16x21 inch) proof sheets, and Microfilm (35 mm) which included 5 rolls labeled “Printing Master” 5 rolls labeled “Master Negative”, and 10 rolls (2 sets of 5 rolls) labeled “Positive Microfilm”.

at Cornell for research purposes to assist “students, faculty, researchers and anyone who has an interest in seeing them or doing research on them.”⁸⁶ (Figure 22)

In “Reading an Archive” Allan Sekula traces the historical role of archival institutions in legitimizing the authority of photographic material, “Clearly archives are not neutral; they embody the power inherent in accumulation, collection, and hoarding” Sekula explains “the photographic project itself has from the very beginning been identified ...with the establishment of global archives and repositories according to models offered by libraries ...”. Photographs appeal to such “institutions for its authority.”⁸⁷ Cornell University would frame the S-21 photographs with an institutional credibility meant to sanctify the evidential might of the images. The photographic catalogues are presented to researchers alongside confessional texts, which are in Khmer, and have not been linked with their respective photographic portraits. To the international researcher, who can not understand Khmer, the photographs must stand on their own without textual mediation to visually testify to the Cambodian atrocity.⁸⁸ However, the archival presentation does not place any stress on visual analysis of the imagery. Gregory Green explains that within the Echols collection, there is no emphasis

⁸⁶ Personal communication with Gregory Green, Curator of Echols Collection on Southeast Asia, Kroch Library, Cornell University (October, 2008).

⁸⁷ Allan Sekula, “Reading an Archive,” in *Blasted Allegories: An Anthology of Writings by Contemporary Artists*, Ed. Brian Wallis (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1987), 118.

⁸⁸ Some of the material housed within the Cornell archive is currently being translated at the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam). A legal response team for the Khmer Rouge Tribunal began operating informally in October 2005 and officially in February 2006 within the archives of the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) and one of their tasks includes compiling and translating relevant Communist Party of Kampuchea telegrams and other communications document, as well as legal material. http://www.dccam.org/Projects/Tribunal_Response_Team/Tribunal_response.htm

on studying the nature of photography.⁸⁹ In this sense, the photographs are being employed as documentary works, aligning with the theoretical side of what Lorraine O'Donnell calls the "realist" argument in a debate that occurred in the 1980s surrounding the concept of the "Total Archive". The "Total Archive" refers to a set of principles and practices in Canadian archival theory.⁹⁰ In her article, "Towards Total Archives: The Form and Meaning of Photographic Records", Lorraine O'Donnell labels two opposing theoretical approaches to archiving photograph, which surrounding the total archives debate; the "realist", and the "critical".⁹¹ The "realists" believed that photography could be distinguished from abstract art, and should be archived, and valued, as representing a real documentation of history. The "critical" approach valued the perspective of the photographer, and didn't see an easy division between art and documentary photography.⁹² The Cornell archive of S-21 images places no inquiry into the role of the creator, or the meaning of the visual imagery. Instead, the emphasis of the archive is to privilege the photographs as documentary evidence. O'Donnell explains that,

When the realist side of the debate focused its attention on photography in particular, it argued that only the "documentary" type was appropriate for archival acquisition. Documentary photographs were portrayed as unproblematically realistic and transparent carriers of "the past."⁹³

⁸⁹ Personal communication with Gregory Green, Curator of Echols Collection on Southeast Asia, Kroch Library, Cornell University (October, 2008).

⁹⁰ Lorraine O'Donnell. "Towards Total Archives: The Form and Meaning of Photographic Records." *Archivaria*, no 38 (Fall 1994): 105.

⁹¹ *Ibid*,107/8.

⁹² *Ibid*,108.

⁹³ *Ibid*,107.

As material carriers of Cambodia's past, the S-21 images are meant to legitimize the certainty of the Cornell archive. Charles Merewether explains the crucial role photography plays in the establishment of the historical archive; "Photography is critical to the practice and authority of the archive, in so far as it folds together history as representation and representation as history."⁹⁴ The apparent neutrality of the archival structure helps to impose the evidential quality of the historical representation. Merewether writes,

Transferring the world to image, photography as a representational structure produces a certain archival effect. And, like photography, the archive gains its authority to represent the past through an apparent neutrality, whereby difference is either erased or regulated. Both the archive and photography reproduce the world as witness to itself, a testimony to the real, historical evidence.⁹⁵

Cornell University continued their involvement with the S-21 archive in May 1993 when they agreed to act as an umbrella organization, providing charitable status to two American photojournalists, Christopher Riley and Douglas Niven, who upon visiting the Tuol Sleng Museum found the thousands of negatives in dreadful condition, inspiring their proposal to go to Cambodia and "rescue an endangered photographic archive."⁹⁶ The original negatives, according to Peter Macguire were found, "covered in mold and rotting in steel file cabinets."⁹⁷ In April 1993 Riley and Niven formed The Photo Archive

⁹⁴ Charles Merewether "Archives of the Fallen" in *The Archive; Documents of Contemporary Art*, ed. Charles Merewether (London: Whitechapel Ventures Limited, 2006), 160.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Rachel Hughes, "The Abject Artifacts of Memory: Photographs from Cambodia's Genocide," *Media Culture, and Society* 25 (2003), 29.

⁹⁷ Peter Maguire, *Facing Death in Cambodia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 3.

Group and submitted a written proposal to the State of Cambodia Minister of Culture.⁹⁸ A month later their project was approved and in February 1994, Christopher Riley in his capacity as project director, and Douglas Niven the project coordinator, along with three American volunteers, flew to Cambodia and constructed a darkroom in Phnom Penh. The darkroom consisted of tables and drying racks made by a local carpenter, air conditioner and a purified water print-washing system.⁹⁹ With the aid of three Cambodian staff who were hired, the Photo Archive Group would began cleaning, indexing and printing 6000 original photographic negatives of the S-21 prisoner portraits. The 6000 negatives they found were reported to have been lying in the archive for thirteen years before they were viewed by Niven and Riley.

The Photo Archive Group would reproduce the negatives to be printed in an edition of six. The Photo Archive Group's Project Summary explains that in June 1994, "one edition is donated to the Tuol Sleng Museum, the rest are brought out of the country for safekeeping."¹⁰⁰ The Photo Archive Group justified their excavation of archival material by citing reports of a larger number of negatives and written confessions which were looted in the months and years after the Khmer Rouge fell from power. One such incident occurred when mug shot photographs and images of dead prisoners were taken by East German photographers in 1981 to be used in the documentary film *Die Angkar*,

⁹⁸ Photo Archive Group (no date) 'Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide Project Summary', unpublished. Found in Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography archive in exhibition file for *Facing Death: Portraits of Cambodia's Killing Fields*. Exhibition held from October 6, 2000 until January 14th, 2001.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Photo Archive Group (no date) 'Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide Project Summary', unpublished. Found in Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography Exhibition File for *Facing Death: Portraits from Cambodia's Killing Field*.

all of which have since disappeared.¹⁰¹ Maguire explains that “Niven and Riley were only restoring what was recorded: the majority of the negatives either had been destroyed or were in private hands.”¹⁰²

The re-catalogued and recovered photographs were presented to Cornell University Library in a binder format including recto-verso pages of the images. The sheer quantity of photographs contained in the catalogues overwhelms each individual print, which becomes dominated by the mass of engulfing imagery. The catalogue presentation emphasizes the repetitive and standardized nature of the mug shots. (Figure 23) Most of the images present the inmates face frontally with their hands tied behind their back, and a number tagged to their chest (Figure 24). On occasion, two images are placed side by side, one presenting the inmate standing, which is juxtaposed to the close-up face and torso (Figure 25). The backgrounds in the majority of the images remain neutral attesting to the KR’s belief in the camera’s optical neutrality. In this regard, the mug shots prescribe to a standardized visual structure reminiscent of Paris Police official Alphonse Bertillon’s (1853-1914) standardized verbal and visual system to describe the criminal. This first effective modern system of *criminal identification*¹⁰³ included the portrait of a person’s face, which was to be taken with a constant focal length, lighting, and distance of the subject from the camera to help insure what Bertillon credited as the objectivity of the print. The photographs were combined with the measurements and

¹⁰¹ Ibid. *Die Anker* is 91 minutes long in colour and black and white. It was written and directed by Walter Heynowski and Gerhard Scheumann. It was produced by Studio H & S Berlin. The *Die Anker* film was the first to be produced with the S-21 images in 1982. The S-21 images have since appeared in numerous international television productions, documentaries, and films.

¹⁰² Peter Maguire, *Facing Death in Cambodia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 3.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

typology of specific body parts, such as the ear and mouth, producing what was considered a unique record of a criminal individual that police could employ.¹⁰⁴

This taxonomic ordering of images of the body was to be further defined as empirical data through the archival structure which “could provide a standard physiognomic gauge of the criminal” by assigning “each criminal body a relative and quantitative position within a larger ensemble.”¹⁰⁵ In a series of the cataloged S-21 photographs the seemingly neutral backgrounds become broken as wire beds, oppressive cells and checkered floors puncture any notion of objectivity in the print (Figure 26). Viewers are visually prompted to inquire about the subjectivity of the photographers, and their location. The location becomes most apparent in a succession of mug shots taken outside the compound whereby inmates are positioned to stand straight against an external prison wall (Figure 27). In a striking sequence of images, inmates are propped by a mechanical aid helping to keep them remain in strict position as their portrait is taking (Figure 28). On occasion the decay of the negative is evident in the print, and black blotches cover portions of the inmate’s faces (Figure 29). The decay reminds viewers that the photographs were taken more than twenty years prior to their being printed by the Photo Archive Group.

In a similar vein to the Khmer Rouge operation, the Bertillon method was incorporated into the Nazi ideology in order to help define the photographic ‘type’ of their believed enemy. The belief in photographic ‘types’ permeated throughout Europe in

¹⁰⁴ Mary Warner Marien, *Photography: A Cultural History*. 2nd Edition. (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2006), 223.

¹⁰⁵ Allan Sekula, “The Body and the Archive,” October, Vol. 39 (1986); 17.

the early twentieth century as seen in the work of influential photographer August Sander's monumental work, *Face of the Time* (1929), which included an inventory of various German societal types including workers, peasants, the middle classes, Jews, National socialists, soldier, and students..¹⁰⁶ Janina Struk, author of *Photographing the Holocaust: Interpreting the Evidence* explains that,

The representation of 'types' and the theory on which Sander based his practice were fundamental to National Socialist propaganda, but the distinctions he portrayed in German society were not acceptable to their ideology. Whereas Sander's photographs had given his subjects a degree of dignity and had celebrated difference, the theory as appropriated by the Nazis to condemn difference.¹⁰⁷

Consequently, Sander's book, *Face of Our Time*, was banished by the Nazis who viewed it as an ideological threat to society. Rather, Hans F.K. Gunther's book first published in 1922, *Rassenkunde des deutschen Volks [Racial Elements of the German People]*, which contained photographic portraits to establish the physiognomic superiority of the Nordic race over those considered 'inferior' including the Jews became a bestseller in Germany.¹⁰⁸ The photographic documentation of the inferior types carried over into the Nazi concentration camps where groups of prisoners were photographed in a mug shot style within identification units. Photographer Wilhelm Brasse was one such photographer who worked in the Erkennungsdienst, the identification service that

¹⁰⁶ Janina Struk, *Photographing the Holocaust: Interpretations of the Evidence* (New York: I.B Tauris & Co Ltd, 2004), 18.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

produced photographic documentation of the camp regime.¹⁰⁹ Brasse had been a photographer in a studio in Silesia before the war and was usurped by the Nazi leaders after six months in a labour camp to help create identify photographs at Auschwitz of newly arrived prisoners.¹¹⁰ Brasse recalls that he “must have taken 40,000 to 50,000 of those identity pictures.”¹¹¹ Jaroslaw Mensfelt, spokesman of the Auschwitz-Birkenau museum believes some 200,000 identification photographs were taken and about 40,000 of these have been preserved, some of which are displayed at Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum and others at Yad Vashem, the Israeli Holocaust memorial.¹¹²

Similarly, the Photograph Archive Group wished to preserve and exhibit the identification photographs taken by the Khmer Rouge regime and display their war crimes. This motivated their involvement with the Tuol Sleng archive. Their process of redeeming the old negatives was sanctified by Cornell University, however, their participation with the photographic negatives became controversial when they claimed ownership over one hundred S-21 images they printed. Historian Lindsay French explains that “in exchange for their work, Niven and Riley were given the rights to 100 images.”¹¹³ Niven and Riley would subsequently offer the hundred S-21 photographic images to various media outlets, art museums and publishers. Rachel Hughes believes that, “It is clear that, from the outset of the project, Niven and Riley’s aims were twofold: the revival of the S-21 photographs *in-situ*; and the circulation of the S-21 prisoner

¹⁰⁹ Janina Struk, “I will never forget these Scenes” *The Guardian*, Thursday January 20 2005.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/jan/20/secondworldwar.warcrimes>

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ryan Lucas., *Auschwitz Photographer, Wilhelm Brasse, Still Sees Images* (Associated Press Winter, 2008) <http://www.digitalimagingmag.com/publication/article.jsp?id=1549&pubId=2>

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Rachel Hughes, “The Object Artifacts of Memory: Photographs from Cambodia’s Genocide,” *Media Culture, and Society* 25 (2003), 29.

portraits through various media outside the Cambodian context.”¹¹⁴ The Photo Archive Group was subsequently criticized by those who saw their claim of ownership over the images as an abuse of power. Many scholars, who have written on the subject, do believe that Riley and Niven were initially motivated by a desire to save the precious negatives from destruction,¹¹⁵ but their decision to sell art quality portfolios of 100 prints from Tuol Sleng has raised serious questions regarding the politics of remembrance. Prominent Cambodian researcher Youk Chang denounced the Photo Archive Group, believing that their desire to assist in the preservation of a national archive had been overtaken by other priorities.¹¹⁶

In 1996 art and photography publishers Twin Palms printed seventy-eight of the individual portrait prints in 22 x 30 cm book entitled *The Killing Fields* (Figure 30).¹¹⁷ Twin palms publisher Jack Woody stated that, when Christopher Riley and Doug Niven sent him photocopies of S-21 prisoner portraits, he thought “they were the most amazing photos [he’d] seen in years.” Woody explains that “The emotional rapport the viewer has with subjects, I hadn’t experienced in a long time.”¹¹⁸ Woody’s belief that the emotional shock of the photograph is what makes it ‘good’ should be placed within the context of an image saturated modern western world. Susan Sontag notes that,

Conscripted as part of journalism, images were expected to arrest attention, startle, surprise. The hunt for more dramatic (as they’re often described) images

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ David Chandler, Ben Kiernan, and Peter Maguire all hold this view.

¹¹⁶ Rachel Hughes, “The Abject Artifacts of Memory: Photographs from Cambodia’s Genocide,” *Media Culture, and Society* 25 (2003).

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Guy Trebay, “Killing Fields of Vision: Was Cambodia’s Genocide Just a Moment of Photographic History?” *The Village Voice* 3 June: 1984

drives the photographic enterprise, and it is part of the normality of a culture in which shock has become a leading stimulus of consumption and source of value.¹¹⁹

Sontag continues to ask, “How else to make a dent when there is incessant exposure to images, and overexposure to a handful of images seen again and again?”¹²⁰ The fact that the horror of the S-21 photographs allows them to penetrate through an image saturated society into the startled consciousness of their viewers, may not necessarily make them ‘good’ for art publications.

The dislocation of the S-21 photographs from their archival structure into a book format invites an entirely new interpretation of the mug shots. The original meaning of the photographs as material proof testifying to the execution of the KR regime’s suspected enemies is far removed from the Western viewer who witnesses a selected few reproduced images. Allan Sekula has written that “the specificity of “original” uses and meanings can be avoided, and even made invisible, when photographs are selected from an archive and reproduced in a book.”¹²¹ No longer associated with the KR’s bureaucratic oppressive documentary ambition, the photograph is being treated as an emotionally potent image, generalizing the representation of the masses who were murdered in Cambodia’s genocide.

The S-21 photographs would take on yet another format, and be further dislocated from their archival structure, as they were accumulated by Yale University’s Cambodia’s

¹¹⁹ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003), p 23.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Allan Sekula, “Reading an Archive,” in *Blasted Allegories: An Anthology of Writings by Contemporary Artists*, Ed. Brian Wallis (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1987), 116.

Genocide Program and presented on a website inviting an international audience to view them on a computer. The website was created after Cornell University completed their microfilming project with the intent of helping bring the KR leaders to international trial. In 1994 U.S. President Bill Clinton signed into law the Cambodian Genocide Act. It states that, consistent with international law, it is the policy of the United States to support efforts to bring to justice members of the Khmer Rouge for their crimes against humanity committed in Cambodia between April 17, 1975 and January 7, 1979.¹²² This legislation established the Office of Cambodian Genocide Investigation with the State Department's East Asia and Pacific Affairs Desk, whereby Yale University was selected as the organization to collect data on genocide in Cambodia and to prepare other information and reports for possible use by the government. The Yale Cambodian Genocide Program began its work in 1995 to build a database that includes computerized maps of prison sites and victim graveyards, a list of the Cambodian elite at the time of genocide, a list of the Khmer Rouge leadership, archives of original documents of the Pol Pot regime, and thousands of the S-21 photographs of victims before their execution at the Tuol Sleng Prison. Leshu Torchin, author of "Since we Forget: Remembrance and Recognition of the Armenian Genocide in Virtual Archives" believes that visual media have played a crucial role in forming witnessing publics and providing testimonials. Torchin believes that "Virtual archives draw upon this framework of testimony in realizing their potential for animating memory, hailing publics and forging political

¹²² Yale University Genocide Studies Program, "Cambodian Genocide Program," Statement of Co-Prosecutors July 17, 2008. http://webdev.yale.edu/cgp/downloads/Statement_of_Co-Prosecutors18-July-2007%20.pdf

transformation.”¹²³ The S-21 photographs presented on the Yale Cambodia Genocide Studies database offer a framework for testimonial narratives. The website is categorized by gender, and age, inviting viewers to identify victims through an interactive response form. The database project explains that,

The photographs are displayed in this section of the Cambodian Genocide Database, along with facilities for the CGDB user to suggest names and other biographical data for unknown victims they may recognize.¹²⁴

The database material, including the photographs, would help mount extensive evidential material allowing for the prosecution of former Khmer Rouge leaders. In March 2003, the United Nations signed an agreement with Cambodia to try the surviving members of the Khmer Rouge leadership for crimes under Cambodian law, international law and custom and international conventions recognized by Cambodia. The crimes include genocide, war crimes and breaches of the Geneva Convention.¹²⁵ In 2007, the long awaited pre-trial hearings were initiated at The Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, commonly known as the Cambodia Tribunal, which is a joint court established by the Royal Government of Cambodia and the United Nations to try senior members of the Khmer Rouge (Figure 31). In the statement of Co-Prosecutors signed on July 18th, 2007 in Phnom Penh at the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia it is explained that,

¹²³ Leshu Torchin, “Since we Forget: Remembrance and Recognition of the Armenian Genocide in Virtual Archives” in Guerin, Francis and Roger Hallas, *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture*. (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), 84.

¹²⁴ Yale University Genocide Studies Program, “Cambodian Genocide Program,” <http://www.yale.edu/cgp/>

¹²⁵ Allan Thompson, Ed. *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 425.

The Co-Prosecutors believe that serious and extensive violations of international humanitarian law and Cambodian law occurred in this country during the period of Democratic Kampuchea from 17 April 1975 to 6 January 1979 ... These crimes were committed as part of a common criminal plan constituting a systematic and unlawful denial of basic rights of the Cambodian population and the targeted persecution of specific groups. The purported motive of this common criminal plan was to effect a radical change of Cambodian society along ideological lines. Those responsible for these crimes and policies included senior leaders of the Democratic Kampuchea regime.¹²⁶

Thus, almost most thirty years after the tragic genocide, cruel Khmer Rouge leaders may finally be prosecuted by a United Nation's special tribunal. The question of which leaders will be held accountable and who deserves to be punished is an ongoing debate that remains unresolved. The tribunal structure will never be able to punish each individual murderer as Craig Etcheson author of *After the Killing Fields: Lessons from the Cambodian Genocide* explains:

When one examines the details of how tribunals are structured, it becomes clear that no solution can yield a completely satisfactory outcome on all the competing values at stake. We see, for example, a range of approaches to the question of personal jurisdiction, that is, who be prosecuted in a genocide tribunal. Though the approaches vary widely, each of them has both advantages

¹²⁶ Yale University Genocide Studies Program, "Cambodian Genocide Program," <http://www.yale.edu/cgp/>.

and disadvantages with respect to the question of impunity. Cambodia's 1979 People's Revolutionary Tribunal prosecuted only two people, leaving many culpable senior leaders untouched, along with thousands of people who carried out the actual killing.¹²⁷

While the tribunal structure remains challenging, it has generated recent interest in the S-21 photographs, and in the photographer of the portraits, Nhem Ein, now 47.¹²⁸ As a lower-ranking obedient teenager at the time, Nhem Ein is not in jeopardy of arrest. However, given his relationship to Duch, a high official who oversaw executions at Tuol Sleng prison he is in a valued position able to offer one of the most personal testimonies at the trial.

Howard Ball author of *Prosecuting War Crimes and Genocide: The Twentieth-Century Experience* offers an interesting explanation of why no legal trial was imposed to Khmer Rouge leaders immediately following the massacres in Cambodia. In 1979, when Vietnam allowed foreign visitors into Cambodia, and the world learned of Cambodia's killing fields, the cold war between Moscow and the Western world was ongoing, and the wars in Indochina had recently concluded. Consequently, throughout the 1980s, the Reagan administration (1981-1989) blocked attempts in the UN to characterize the events of 1975-1979 as genocide, or to hold Pol Pot and his followers responsible for the mass

¹²⁷ Craig Etcheson, *After the Killing Fields: Lesson from the Cambodian Genocide*. (Texas: Texas Tech University Press, 2006), 183.

¹²⁸ Seth Mydans, "Out from Behind a Camera at a Khmer Torture House." *New York Times*, October 26th, 2007.

murder of Cambodians that took place during their reign.¹²⁹ Until 1992, Hall explains, the Khmer Rouge, although out of power since 1979, still occupied Cambodia's seat at the UN.¹³⁰ Stephan Heder offers another theory as to why the tribunal was so delayed; the dilemma facing the United State was that a trial could have raised international questions about the U.S. bombings in Cambodia from 1969 to 1973.¹³¹

International tribunals helping prosecute war criminals were implemented after World War I. Until World War I, punishment after a conflict ended was rare, and was handled by the nation's military court. This consciousness began to shift at The Hague conferences of 1889 and 1907, with agreement on the fundamental principal that every individual, irrespective of nationality, was both a subject and a member of an international community.¹³² Consequently the creation of the League of Nations after World War I saw the establishment of international laws prosecuting war aggression. In the wake of World War II, the Nuremberg Trials, which brought to trial and punishment the Nazis found guilty of waging aggressive war, war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide provided a pivotal conceptual turn articulated by Shoshanna Felman in *The Judicial Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century*. Felman believes that the Nuremberg tribunal represented the first time that history itself was called into the court of justice. Prior to this moment, Felman states the law perceived itself as ahistorical, maintaining a radical theoretical division between history and justice.¹³³ The

¹²⁹ Howard Ball, *Prosecuting War Crimes and Genocide: The Twentieth-Century Experience*. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999), 116.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid, 115.

¹³² Ibid, 118.

¹³³ Shoshana Felman, *The Juridical Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century*. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002), 11.

merger between history and justice allowed for a new type of collective remembrance to occur through the enactment of a legal trial.

Many critics fear that the upcoming Tribunal on the Cambodian genocide, already too late to render justice to the victims, may not accomplish any real change. For Vann Nath, one of seven Tuol Sung prison survivors, and one of two still alive, a Tribunal, which he has desperately yearned for, is of great importance. Nath credits the tribunal as a site of collective remembrance explaining, “We need to understand.”¹³⁴ Rather than punishment, Nath believes it is important for perpetrators as well as victims to come to terms with the past.¹³⁵ Shoshana Felman argues that in addressing the past, legal procedures throughout the twentieth century have attempted to repair historical trauma by giving a voice to those history has rendered silent becoming a critical juncture for collective remembrance. “The court,” Felman explains,

Gives stage to the tradition of the oppressed, in helping the *expressionless* of that tradition (the silence of the persecuted, the unspeakability of trauma of oppression) to come into expression.¹³⁶

Felman is drawing on Walter Benjamin’s use of the term “*expressionless (das Ausdruckslose)*” to denote those whom violence has deprived of appearance, and historically made faceless.¹³⁷ In this sense the S-21 photographs, representing the faces of those silenced by persecution, act as vital visual remains offering emblematic

¹³⁴ Ron Gluckman, “A Survivor's Story” *Asian Wall Street Journal*, March 2005.
<http://www.gluckman.com/CambodiaVannNath.html> (accessed October, 2008).

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Shoshana Felman, *The Juridical Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 13.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

expression to countless murdered genocide victims within the tribunal structure. With Duch being tried for crimes against humanity, the meaning of the S-21 photographs is about to pivot in this important historical juncture. The S-21 archive of photographs created as evidential material reflecting the KR regime's might, inspire an inverse meaning as evidential weight aiding the international condemnation, and political demise of the tyrannical leaders.

CHAPTER TWO

MoMA: *Photographs from S-21:1975-1979*

In 1997 the S-21 photographs took on a drastically new meaning in shaping the North American remembrance of the Cambodian genocide when twenty-two selected portraits went on display in Gallery Three at the Museum of Modern Art, New York in an exhibition entitled *Photographs from S-21: 1975-1979*.¹³⁸ The geographical context, New York, the epicenter of western capitalism, framed the S-21 images in an institution symbolizing the antithesis of the political philosophy in which they were originally created to facilitate a peasant communist revolution in Cambodia.

Susan Kismaric, chief curator of the photography department at the Museum of Modern Art explains that the MoMA institution never had any direct contact with the archives housed in Cambodia. Christopher Riley and Douglas Niven “had produced a portfolio of pictures from the archive that they were making available to institutions.”¹³⁹ The Photo Archive Group’s desire to use the S-21 photographs as vehicles to bring international awareness to the Cambodian atrocities is commendable. Cultural Historian Rachel Hughes author of “The abject artifacts of memory: photographs from Cambodia’s genocide” believes that the international interest in, and sympathy for Cambodia’s past and present has undoubtedly been fuelled by the global exposure to the S-21 photographs.¹⁴⁰ However, the Photo Archive Group’s decision to sell limited edition

¹³⁸ The MoMA exhibition *Photographs from S-21* was held from May 15th, to September 30th 1997.

¹³⁹ Susan Kismaric, [Chief Curator of MoMA photography department]. Interview by Jacqueline Sischy. Tape recording. May 19, 2008. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

¹⁴⁰ Rachel Hughes, “The Abject Artifacts of Memory: Photographs from Cambodia’s Genocide,” *Media Culture, and Society* 25 (2003): 30.

portfolios of 100 prints from Tuol Sleng raises serious questions regarding the ethics of remembrance.¹⁴¹ Their claim of ownership over the images was seen by critics as an abuse of power. Thomas Roma, director of photography, and associate professor of art at Columbia University notes that, “The question of who actually owns the S-21 photographs is a moral one. Riley and Niven have obtained the international copyright for the 100 negatives they printed.”¹⁴² He asks, “Can anyone truly “own” the evidence of lost human lives?”¹⁴³ Thomas Roma doubts Niven and Riley really weighed the moral weight of their choice when they were selecting the 100 images for display:

Weren't they afraid that, just by choosing which prints to make, they might be participating in some other injustice? Given the public's notoriously short attention span and our demonstrated inability to empathize with the plight of others, weren't Riley and Niven afraid that the chosen of 100 might fill our quota for Cambodian victims and push the 5,900 other victims forever out of our consciousness? Did they weigh the risk of their choices, and, more important, was it their risk to take?¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Douglas Niven and Christopher Riley contributed to a similar project in which they reprinted war photographs created by Vietnamese photographers during the Vietnam War (1962-1975). Niven was surprised to realize that photographs taken by Vietnamese photographers went undiscovered for twenty-five years after the end of the Vietnam War. Riley subsequently decided to amass a collection of the images to be published in 2002 by the National Geographic Society in a book entitled *Another Vietnam: Pictures of the War From the Other Side*. The book was edited by Douglas Niven and Christopher Riley and includes 180 black and white photographs along with a text by Tim

Page.<http://digitalfilmmaker.net/vietnam/review.shtml> Accessed April 6, 2009

¹⁴² Thomas Roma, “Looking into the Face of Our Own Worst Fears through Photographs,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* Vol. 44, Issue. 10 (1997): B10.

¹⁴³ Thomas Roma, “Looking into the Face of Our Own Worst Fears through Photographs,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* Vol. 44, Issue. 10 (1997): B10.

¹⁴⁴ Thomas Roma, “Looking into the Face of Our Own Worst Fears through Photographs,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* Vol. 44, Issue. 10 (1997): B11.

Whose right is it to shape historical memory? A photograph aids the recitation of historical events and cultural institutions that frame the photographs are responsible for dictating the narratives to contemporary audiences. If Niven and Riley are held responsible for altering the nature of remembrance of the Cambodian genocide in North America through their selection of the S-21 photographs, then a critical examination needs to be equally applied to the institutions, such as the Museum of Modern Art, that helped facilitate the exposure of prints. As cultural historian Barbie Zeilzer explains:

Modern culture's capacity to freeze, replay, and store visual memories for large numbers of people, facilitated by museums, art galleries, television archives, and other visual data banks, has enhanced our ability to make the past work for present aims. Discussions of photographic memory thereby become at some level discussions of cultural practice, of the strategies by which photographs are made and collected, retained and stored, recycled and forgotten.¹⁴⁵

Photographs which are not privileged and legitimized by cultural institutions can be neglected, and ultimately obliterated from modern day consciousness. Walter Benjamin wrote that "every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns, threatens to disappear irretrievably."¹⁴⁶ Accordingly, Thomas Roma references his colleague Todd Gitlin, professor of culture, journalism, and sociology at New York

¹⁴⁵ Barbie Zelizer, "The Voice of the Visual in Memory." in *Framing Public Memory*, edited by Kendall R. Phillips, 155-184. (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 161.

¹⁴⁶ Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), p. 255.

University who compared the selection process of the S-21 images to having to decide who was going to live or die.¹⁴⁷

The selection criteria Niven and Riley used to choose which S-21 photographs to privilege for display was scrutinized by critics who questioned the aesthetic grounds which potentially influenced their decision. Historian Paul Williams severely denounces Niven and Riley's selection process for MoMA comparing it to the gruesome practices of the Nazis explaining,

A disquieting question concerns the aesthetic grounds on which the MoMA pictures were chosen. By selecting what appear to be the most aesthetically satisfying and emotionally powerful images, Riley and Niven perhaps performed their own kind of culling. The process uncomfortably evokes the Nazi practice of separating for disposal unfit concentration-camp prisoners.¹⁴⁸

This evocation seems harsh; however, an examination as to why Niven and Riley selected the images they did is pertinent to examining how a North American public is able to digest the gruesome horrors of genocide.

In their project summary Douglas Niven and Christopher Riley never included aesthetics as one of their influences for their selection criteria. Rather, they describe that in April 1994, "One hundred negatives [were] selected for exhibition printing on 11 x 14 inch fiber paper. Negatives [were] chosen for photographic quality, historical value and

¹⁴⁷ Thomas Roma, "Looking into the Face of Our Own Worst Fears through Photographs," *Chronicle of Higher Education* Vol. 44, Issue. 10 (1997): B11.

¹⁴⁸ Paul Williams, "Witnessing Genocide: Vigilance and Remembrance at Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 18 (2004): 244.

to present a cross-section of Tuol Sleng's victims."¹⁴⁹ Susan Kismaric notes that Niven and Riley never explained their selection criteria in greater detail to the Museum of Modern Art, and she believes "they chose pictures that they thought would be representative [of the S-21 archive] and the most affective."¹⁵⁰

MoMA and The Photo Archive Group both deny that aesthetics influenced their selection of twenty two S-21 photographs. Their denials reveal the complexities of bearing witness to the world's atrocities through the aesthetically pleasing medium of photography. Given the gruesome context in which the S-21 photographs were taken, aesthetic considerations are deemed inappropriate as overt influences guiding the narration of history. To privilege the remembrance of one human life over another because a photographic image appeals to the visual appetites of its viewers could be deemed insensitive and inhumane. As Susan Sontag states "photography that bears witness to the calamitous and the reprehensible is much criticized if it seems "aesthetic"; that is, too much like art."¹⁵¹

The Photo Archive group and the Museum of Modern Art may not overtly reveal that aesthetics influenced their decision in selecting the prints to display, however, by choosing to place the images on the walls of Gallery Three at MoMA, 'Art' is precisely what the S-21 prints become. Sontag explains,

¹⁴⁹ Photo Archive Group (no date) 'Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide Project Summary', unpublished. Found in Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography archive in exhibition file for Facing Death: Portraits of Cambodia's Killing Fields. Exhibition held from October 6, 2000 until January 14th, 2001.

¹⁵⁰ Susan Kismaric, [Chief Curator of MoMA photography department]. Interview by Jacqueline Sischy. Tape recording. May 19, 2008. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

¹⁵¹ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003), 76.

So far as photographs with the most solemn or heartrending subject matter are art and that is what they become when they hang on walls, whatever the disclaimers, they partake of the fate of all wall-hung or floor-supported art displayed in public spaces.¹⁵²

The controversial nature of calling the S-21 photographs ‘Art’, prompted MoMA to show the photographs outside the permanent photographic collection, which presents a canon of Western artistic photography.

Susan Kismaric, curator of MoMA’s photography department, describes Gallery Three as “a very discrete space,”¹⁵³ that included two chairs and a coffee table, where the book, *The Killing Fields* (Twin Palms Publishers, 1996) was displayed. Kismaric portrays the gallery as a controlled environment where MoMA displayed “highly select exhibitions”¹⁵⁴. A “meditative space,” which was “architecturally designed such that the exhibitions were set off from the permanent collection including photography’s survey, and viewers could choose to enter the space.”¹⁵⁵ While MoMA attempted to place a vague barrier between the S-21 portraits, and a discourse of Western art photography through physical partitions, eventually the S-21 photographs would enter the canon of artistic portraiture when MoMA and The Los Angeles County Museum decided to

¹⁵² Ibid, 121.

¹⁵³ Susan Kismaric [Chief Curator of MoMA photography department] in discussion with the author. Tape recording, May 18, 2008. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

purchase eight of the portraits. The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art purchased nine.¹⁵⁶

MoMA's justification in purchasing material remains from Cambodia's Genocide was to view the S-21 photographs as vehicles for social reform to raise "consciousness."¹⁵⁷ When asked what selection criteria MoMA used to decide which photographs to acquire for their permanent collection Susan Kismaric explained the difficulty of the selection process akin to selecting photographs from the notable photographer Lewis Hine's renowned corpus. Hine used the camera as a means of social reform, notably as a photographer for the National Child Labor Committee (N.C.L.A.) where between the years of 1907 and 1918 he would shoot photographs of children at work with the aim of influencing reform on child labor legislation to control industrial hiring practices.¹⁵⁸ (Figure 32) "How do you choose a Lewis Hine picture?" Kismaric asks "Lewis Hine made 10 000 photographs... Why are there ones that are better than others?" Lewis Hine used the photographic medium with an aim to appeal to the morality of viewers, who would empathize with the plight of the children depicted. In a similar manner, Kismaric argues that MoMA aimed to select the S-21 "photographs which seemed most authentic in terms of describing the experience of the victim."¹⁵⁹ A noticeable proportion of the MoMA prints involve depictions of Cambodian children. Karen Wells, author of

¹⁵⁶ Guy Trebay, "Killing Fields of Vision: Was Cambodia's Genocide Just a Moment of Photographic History?" *The Village Voice* (June 3, 1997): 34.

¹⁵⁷ Susan Kismaric [Chief Curator of MoMA photography department] in discussion with the author. Tape recording, May 19, 2008. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

¹⁵⁸ Mary Warner Marien, *Photography: A Cultural History*. 2nd Edition (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2006), 206.

¹⁵⁹ Susan Kismaric [Chief Curator of MoMA photography department] in discussion with the author. Tape recording, May 19, 2008. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

“Narratives of liberation and narration of innocent suffering: the rhetorical uses of images of Iraqi children in the British press,” argues that;

Representations of children have a very specific place in the iconography of war. Unlike images of adults that are inscribed into discourses of moral blame and political calculation, images of children may be fitted into a universalizing discourse. In such a discourse, ‘the world’s children should be protected from the conflicts of adults’ (extending from parental conflict through to international conflict), and deserve the care and concern of any adult, regardless of their national or political allegiances.¹⁶⁰

MoMA may have selected images of children to express a universal human plight, but the question remains, can the selected S-21 photographs displayed at the Museum of Modern Art in 1997, twenty years after the atrocities took place in the Tuol Sleng Prison in Phnom Penh, truly convey the experiences of the Tuol Sleng victims?

Without knowledge of their context, the mug shots seen at first glance do not read as visual horror. The photographs do not portray blood, the act of gory beatings, killings, nor do they depict dead prisoners. The photography sub-unit at the Tuol Sleng Prison also photographed dead prisoners¹⁶¹, and photographs of inmates drenched in blood have been preserved and exhibited at the Tuol Sleng Museum. These images do not appear in the MoMA exhibition. All twenty-two images MoMA displayed are frontal close-ups of prisoners (Refer to Figures 35 -40), taken prior to their murders, placing them within a

¹⁶⁰ Karen Wells, “Narratives of liberation and narratives of innocent suffering: the rhetorical uses of images of Iraqi children in the British press.” *Visual Communication*, Vol. 6, No. 1, (2007): 66.

¹⁶¹ David P. Chandler, *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot’s Secret Prison* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1999) 27.

historical trope of western visual imagery Barbie Zelizer has isolated which she calls the about-to-die moment. The about-to-die motif, beginning with the Crucifixion has reigned the aesthetic choice to visualize death in western civilization. Zelizer explains,

The moment before death has long been seen as one of the most perplexing, complicated, and interesting moments in contemporary civilization. Seen in many instances as the preferred version of death's representation the final moment before death can be traced as an enduring trope.¹⁶²

In *Regarding the Pain of Others* Susan Sontag likens the S-21 photographs to Titian's painting, *The Flaying of Marsyas* (Figure 33), which depicts an about-to-die moment. Sontag explains, "These Cambodian women and men of all ages, including many children, photographed from a few feet away, usually in half figure, are as in Titian's *The Flaying of Marsyas*, where Apollo's knife is eternally about to be murdered, forever wronged."¹⁶³ The enduring trope became evident when the World Trade Center's collapsed and depictions of death were omitted from publication. Rather, it was deemed more appropriate to show people on the brink of death by portraying the towers burning.¹⁶⁴ Zelizer believes that there was an additional function in representing the "towers burning shortly before their monumental demise. It forced spectators to imagine or presume the precise circumstance of the individuals who faced their death."¹⁶⁵ Similarly, by capturing the prisoners awaiting their forthcoming death the S-21

¹⁶² Barbie Zelizer, "The Voice of the Visual in Memory." In *Framing Public Memory*, edited by Kendall R. Phillips, 155-184. (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 166.

¹⁶³ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003), 6.

¹⁶⁴ Barbie Zelizer, "The Voice of the Visual in Memory." In *Framing Public Memory*, edited by Kendall R. Phillips, 155-184. (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 166.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 176.

photographs invite viewers to contemplate the victim's inevitable fate which looms imminently as they stare towards the camera. Zelizer argues that the about-to-die trope has reigned the preferred way of remembering tragic events because they inhabit the right "voice", a photographic concept which denotes the relationship developed between image and spectator. As Zelizer explains, "voice" refers to the "relationship developed between the spectator and the image involving state of mind, attitude, temporal and sequential positioning and to those aspects of the image that help the spectator develop that relationship."¹⁶⁶ The S-21 photographs have captured the right 'voice' in detailing the events of the Cambodian genocide. Historian of the Tuol Sleng Prison, David Chandler, believes the photographs capturing Tuol Sleng victims in the moments prior to their death, as opposed to already dead, creates a stronger emotional response amongst viewers. "Knowing as we do, and as they did not, that every one of them was facing death when the photographs were taken gives the photos an unnerving quality that is more affecting" Chandler states "than the photographs of dead prisoners."¹⁶⁷

One of the most famous photographs within the about-to-die motif, the 1968 photographs of a South Vietnamese chief of a national police, General Nguyen Ngoc Loan shooting a Veitcong prisoner Nguyen Van Lem in the head (Figure 34), provides an excellent example of the symbolic force this trope plays in creating a North American national consciousness for remembrance. Eddie Adams took a sequence of photographs of the event, including numerous images of the executed Vietcong prisoner, however, these images, like the gory photographs of dead prisoners at the Tuol Sleng Prisoners did

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 162.

¹⁶⁷ David P. Chandler, *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot's Secret Prison* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1999) 27.

not make it widely into international circulation. Instead, the picture of the prisoner about to die became a potent symbol of anti-war sentiment playing a crucial role in turning U.S. public opinion against the war.¹⁶⁸ The image has consequently been repeatedly printed and exhibited for retrospectives on the Vietnam War.¹⁶⁹ Gory photographs of prisoners at the Tuol Sleng prison dead, drenched in blood, have been repeatedly captured, and like the images of the dead Vietcong prisoner, these photographs have yet to deeply enter the international lexicon of images. Rather, akin to Adam's Pulitzer prize winning photograph of a prisoner awaiting death, the photographs of the inmates about to die have become the established model to visualize the Cambodian trauma. While the S-21 photographs were created with the intent of proving the death of individuals within a secret KR organization, General Loan invited an international audience to witness the execution of the Vietcong prisoner by leading him with his hands behind his back out to the street where journalists had gathered, allowing Adams to capture the iconic photograph.¹⁷⁰ Similarly, men, women and children in the S-21 photographs pose with their hands behind their back and an international audience is invited to MoMA to witness their anticipated execution.

In contrast to Adam's photograph of General Loan's killing, it is hard for viewers to discern where the S-21 photographs were taken as the environment of the Tuol Sleng prison is largely omitted from the portraits. Six of the eight photographs owned by MoMA depict prisoners against completely neutral backgrounds, while two reveal an

¹⁶⁸ Barbie Zelizer, "The Voice of the Visual in Memory." In *Framing Public Memory*, edited by Kendall R. Phillips, 155-184. (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 169.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003), 59.

unknown cabinet door. One photograph of a young girl's neutral gaze (Figure 35) could easily be placed within a lexicon of Western artistic portraiture akin to photographs taken by American photographer Richard Avedon, who frequently shot close-up, frontal views of subjects against neutral backgrounds without props. The visual resemblances between Avedon's portraiture style and the S-21 photographs are so striking that Paul Williams attested that one reviewer of MoMA's exhibition *Photographs from S-21* "flattered the unknown photographer...with a comparison to Diane Arbus and Richard Avedon."¹⁷¹

Closer examination of the photographs reveals hints at the horrific situation which produced them, making it clear that no artist set out to create this work. In one print (Figure 36), a hand forcefully clenching the arm of a visibly distressed young boy discloses the strict rules by which subjects were placed in front of the camera by Khmer Rouge forces. One photograph portrays a fearful man standing blindfolded, handcuffed to another whose face is cut off by the picture frame (Figure 37). The facial expression of one victim is so powerful that the MoMA catalogues have labeled the close-up facial portrait "Untitled (Prisoner of the Khmer Rouge; terrified man) (Figure 38)."¹⁷² Bruises on a little boy's (Figure 39) face are the closest the photographs come to revealing the torture techniques used at the Tuol Sleng prison which included beating by hand, with a heavy stick, with branches, with bunches of electric wire.¹⁷³ A woman standing distraught next to a very young boy (Figure 40), likely her child presents the cross-section of ages and genders targeted at the Tuol Sleng Prison. David Chandler author of

¹⁷¹ Paul Williams, "Witnessing Genocide: Vigilance and Remembrance at Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 18 (2004): 244.

¹⁷² Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) exhibition file for *Photographs from S-21: 1975-1979*.

¹⁷³ David P. Chandler, *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot's Secret Prison* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1999), 130.

“*Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot’s Secret Prison*” explains that upon entering the prison, male and female prisoners were segregated, and women with small children stayed with their children while their husbands underwent separate interrogation before the entire family was killed.¹⁷⁴

While the S-21 photographs displayed at the MoMA exhibition do present different age groups and both genders, the desire to select images which best convey the horrors experienced by a vast array of victims throughout the Cambodian genocide is a daunting feat, which can never be truly realized. Zelizer argues that difficulties arise when photographs are used to form remembrance for a collective past as photographs are at best,

Arbitrary, composite, conventionalized, and simplified glimpses of the past. They are conventionalized, because the image has to be meaningful for entire group: simplified, because in order to be generally meaningful and capable of transmission, the complexity of the image must be reduced as far as possible.¹⁷⁵

The curatorial desire to transmit the experiences of the Tuol Sleng victims to art museum visitors becomes even more disheartening when considering the inevitable moral distance created for viewers who digest horrific history through the photographic medium. In *On Photography* Susan Sontag argues that the moralist approach to reveal truth in photography, as seen in the photographs of Lewis Hine, can never supersede its aesthetic appeal. Contrary to a humanist proposition for photography, the camera’s penchant for

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 38.

¹⁷⁵ Barbie Zelizer, “The Voice of the Visual in Memory.” In *Framing Public Memory*, edited by Kendall R. Phillips, 155-184. (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 169.

capturing beauty contributes to its weakness in conveying truth.¹⁷⁶ Within such a philosophy, the S-21 photographs, like Lewis Hine's photographs of exploited children, cannot produce moral outrage amongst its viewers as the aesthetic qualities of the images, viewed years after the cruel events took place, neutralize the digestion of the subject matter. As Sontag states,

Lewis Hine's photographs of exploited children in the turn-of-the century American mills and mines easily outlast the relevance of their subject matter. Protected middle-class inhabitants of the more affluent corners of the world those regions where most photographs are taken and consumed learn about the world's horrors mainly through the camera: photographs can and do distress. But the aestheticizing tendency of photography is such that the medium which conveys distress ends by neutralizing it.¹⁷⁷

The aesthetic importance of the S-21 photographs was further underscored by MoMA's exhibition policy, which has historically refrained from exhibiting photographs alongside excessive textual information to "try and get people to look at the photographs."¹⁷⁸ The exhibit included a brief text panel written by assistant curator of the photography department, Adrienne Williams, who was in charge of curating the show, which explained that "Khmer Rouge Soldiers took the photographs for purposes of

¹⁷⁶ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1973), 112.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹⁷⁸ Susan Kismaric [Chief Curator of MoMA photography department] in discussion with the author. Tape recording, May 19th, 2008. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

identification and documentation.”¹⁷⁹ The text panel provided a remarkably brief history of Cambodian between the years of 1975 and 1979. It read:

The communist group known as the Khmer Rouge seized power in Cambodia in April 1975, after five years of disastrous civil war. Under the leadership of Pol Pot, the secretary of Cambodia’s communist party, the Khmer Rouge rounded up and held captive more than 14,000 Cambodian men, women, and children in S-21, a top secret prison in the Phnom Penh district of Tuol Sleng.¹⁸⁰

The fact that the United States had a direct relationship with Cambodia’s civil war, knowledge which would have drastically altered the meaning of the photographs to the viewer in an American museum, was entirely omitted from the textual narration of Cambodia’s recent politics. As Rachel Hughes explains, “No mention was made of the fact that this ‘civil war’ was a conflict gravely exacerbated by the secret bombing campaigns visited on Cambodia by the United States.”¹⁸¹ Whitney Griswold Professor of History at Yale University, Ben Kiernan, who founded Yale’s Genocide Program, and served as director of the Cambodian genocide project since 1994, has been instrumental in disclosing documents attesting to genocidal crimes of the Khmer Rouge regime through research supported by the U.S. state department. Kiernan explains that the U.S. bombings directly relate to the political tyranny in which the S-21 victims were murdered. Kiernan writes in his article “The US Bombardment of Kampuchea, 1969-1973” that,

¹⁷⁹ Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)(wall text and press release) exhibition file for *Photographs from S-21: 1975-1979*.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Rachel Hughes, “The Abject Artifacts of Memory: Photographs from Cambodia’s Genocide,” *Media Culture, and Society* 25 (2003):36.

On March 18, 1969, The United States Air Force began its secret B-52 bombardment of rural Cambodia. The United States bombings of the countryside continued (now publicly), and increased from 1970 to August 1973...Rural Cambodia was destroyed and the “Democratic Kampuchea” rose in the ashes. The Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK), ruled under Pol Pot, used the devastation and mass execution of civilians created by U.S. bombings as propaganda for recruitment purposes.¹⁸²

Kiernan explains,

Civic casualties in Cambodia drove an enraged populace into the arms of an insurgency that had enjoyed relatively little support until the bombing began, setting in motion the expansion of the Vietnam War deeper into Cambodia, a *coup d'état* in 1970, the rapid rise of the Khmer Rouge, and ultimately the Cambodian genocide.¹⁸³

The framing of the photographs under this textual narrative would have radically shifted the reactions amongst viewers who would be forced to consider the political implications of America's recent history and the photographs of slaughter they are digesting. This political contemplation would have likely caused a moral reaction amongst viewers. Sontag believes,

¹⁸² Kiernan, Ben “The US Bombardment of Cambodia, 1969-1973,” *Vietnam Generation*, 1: 1, Winter 1989, pp. 4-41 Cambodian Genocide Program, Yale University. <http://www.yale.edu/cgp/us.html>

¹⁸³ Ben Kiernan and Taylor Owen, “Bombs over Cambodia.” *The Walrus* (Oct. 2006), 63. Cambodian Genocide Program, Yale University. <http://www.yale.edu/cgp/us.html> Accessed April 6, 2009

What determines the possibility of being affected morally by photographs is the existence of a relevant political consciousness. Without a politics, photographs of the slaughter-bench of history will most likely be experienced as, simply, unreal or as a demoralizing emotional blow.¹⁸⁴

MoMA, the paradigm of the “white cube” rhetoric of modernist neutrality, is not the type of cultural institution to couch its display of art within textual narratives of historical politics. The MoMA aesthetic, first created by art historian and director Alfred Barr in the early twentieth century rejected the taxonomic procedures for display of the nineteenth century, calling for individual aesthetic judgment which better suited the development of abstract art during the late nineteenth and twentieth century.¹⁸⁵ This aesthetic philosophy carried over to the exhibition practices guiding *Photographs from S-21: 1974-1979*, which refrained from excessive contextual guidance mediating the viewer’s engagement with the work. Susan Kismaric defends the curatorial approach of *Photographs from S-21* as a relatively non-mediated exhibition explaining that “we’re not here to defend political causes or to project them.”¹⁸⁶

MoMA may not overtly set out to project political philosophies through their exhibition spaces, but can a cultural institution ever be politically neutral? Neutrality itself is a political statement, and some critics and members of the public reacted to the politically neutral curatorial premise of *Photographs from S-21* with ethical outrage. A visitor response book, a practice accompanying exhibitions held in Gallery Three with

¹⁸⁴ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1973), 109.

¹⁸⁵ David Dernie, *Exhibition Design* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2006.), 9.

¹⁸⁶ Susan Kismaric [Chief Curator of MoMA photography department] in discussion with the author. Tape recording, May 19th, 2008. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

the intent of engaging the public¹⁸⁷ offers insight into the visceral critiques offered by museum goers who frequently questioned the MoMA institution, the upholder of modern art, as the most appropriate venue for the S-21 photographs. For example, Amy Schlegel from Burlington, Vermont wrote, “This exhibit should be at the UN or at the site where these atrocities took place rather than in the bastion of modernism that MoMA represents.”¹⁸⁸ Many complained that there was insufficient contextualization of the images, as one visitor wrote “The room needs more history. It’s not okay to make ‘the eyes’ speak to a decontextualized universal suffering.”¹⁸⁹ Visitors suggested the photographs be re-contextualized through the provisions of maps, authority statements, or the involvement of the diasporic Cambodian communities.¹⁹⁰ They debated historical events, notions of justice, and moral responsibility.¹⁹¹ Visitors questioned the politics of memory, writing, “Whose memory is this?... What form of memory?”¹⁹²

Art critics similarly denounced the decontextualization of S-21 images presented at MoMA. Guy Trebay asks in his exhibition review for the *Village Voice* “Is it ignorance, though, or moral attrition that makes possible the exhibition of pictures from genocide with only the flimsiest framework of context? Who are the people in the Tuol Sleng photos? Who are their families?”¹⁹³ MoMA can be fairly criticized for exhibiting the photographs with minimal contextual information, but it is unfair to denounce the

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Daniel Pinchbeck, “Jottings of Death in Gallery Three.” *The New York Observer* (July 21st, 1997).

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Rachel Hughes, “The Abject Artifacts of Memory: Photographs from Cambodia’s Genocide,” *Media Culture, and Society* 25 (2003):37.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)(Visitor response book) exhibition file for *Photographs from S-21: 1975-1979*.

¹⁹³ Guy Trebay, “Killing Fields of Vision: Was Cambodia’s Genocide Just a Moment of Photographic History?” *The Village Voice* (June 3, 1997): 34.

institution for omitting information they did not know. The identification of the victims in the photographs remains an ongoing research pursuit. Although vast amounts of prison “confessions,” found at the Tuol Sleng Site along with the S-21 photographs, have been collected by international genocide researchers, few have been matched with their respective portraits.¹⁹⁴ None of the individual names associated with the twenty two S-21 prisoner portraits exhibited at MoMA were presented with identification. While MoMA can be exonerated for omitting all of the prisoner portraits names, they can be held culpable for refraining from exhibiting a few of the names associated with the portraits. Rachel Hughes reported in her article *The Abject Artifacts of Memory: Photographs from Cambodia’s Genocide*, that some names of the pictured prisoners in the MoMA display had been identified by historians and the Photo Archive Group. Hughes writes that, “Facsimile copies of five portraits included in the final exhibition were forwarded by the Photo Archive Group to MoMA with ‘the names we have’.”¹⁹⁵ Eight portraits currently housed in MoMA’s permanent collection are catalogued without their identified names indicating that the museum is not aware of them.¹⁹⁶

How would the name of the victim alter the meaning of the S-21 portrait? Does a name offer a respect to the deceased individual life? Does it solidify the remembrance of one unjust murder, which can too easily be swallowed up into a larger historical narrative

¹⁹⁴ Seth Mydans, “Out from Behind a Camera at a Khmer Torture House,” *New York Times*, October 26, 2007, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9805E1DA1231F934A15753C1A9619C8B63&scp=1&sq=out+from+behind+the+camera&st=nym> (accessed February 24, 2008).

¹⁹⁵ Rachel Hughes, “The Abject Artifacts of Memory: Photographs from Cambodia’s Genocide,” *Media Culture, and Society* 25 (2003):41.

¹⁹⁶ Susan Kismaric [Chief Curator of MoMA photography department] in discussion with the author. Tape recording, May 19th, 2008. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

of genocide's tyrannical leaders, and mass executions? Peter S. Hawkins in "Naming Names: The art of memory and the Names Project Aids Quilt" argues that,

Human beings are alone in imagining their own deaths; they are also unique in their need to remember the dead and to keep on imagining them. Central to this act of memory is the name of the deceased, that familiar formula of identity by which a person seems to live on after life itself is over. To forget a name is in effect to allow death to have the last word.¹⁹⁷

Consequently, memorials of the deceased often emphasize the names of the victims as seen in the aftermath of World War I when allied forces decided to commemorate every individual fallen soldier by name regardless of their rank on gravestones or monuments when burial was impossible due to missing bodies.¹⁹⁸ In the aftermath of the Holocaust, Yad Vashem, the first Holocaust memorial museum which opened in Jerusalem in 1955 placed a great emphasis on collecting the names of victims to help preserve the memory of the deceased. Yad Vashem initiated the Names Recovery Campaign with the hope that a name would fulfill their institutional desire to preserve remembrance of the persecuted Jews, as their project summary states: "Since 1955, Yad Vashem has worked to fulfill its mandate to preserve the memory of the six million Jews

¹⁹⁷ Peter S. Hawkins. "Naming Names: the art of memory and the NAMES Project AIDS Quilt," in *Thinking about Exhibitions*, ed. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne (New York: Routledge, 1996), 134.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

who perished in the Holocaust by collecting their names, the ultimate representation of a person's identity.”¹⁹⁹

Jeff Yan, publisher of *A. Magazine*, the national bimonthly of Asian American Culture compares the remembrance of the Holocaust to MoMA's exhibition of the S-21 photographs writing “If Holocaust photos were displayed without any real context in an art museum, would we find that morally acceptable?”²⁰⁰ Photographs depicting victims of the Holocaust are predominantly displayed throughout North America in Holocaust Memorial Museums, such as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum which was inaugurated in 1994 in Washington DC. Holocaust Museums enlist photographs as aids to display historical narratives with the intent of fostering remembrance. The S-21 photographs were similarly enlisted by The Photo Archive Group to bring awareness to a North American audience, and mark the remembrance of the Cambodian Genocide. The greatest difference resides in the Photo Archive Group's employment of the images as art and as Sontag says, “It seems exploitative to look at harrowing photographs of other peoples' pain in an art gallery.”²⁰¹

Kismaric believes the controversy surrounding the exhibit *Photograph from S-21* arose from a schism between vernacular photography and an aesthetic photograph art's tradition.²⁰² She insists that “It's vernacular work,”²⁰³ and defended the unmediated

¹⁹⁹ Yad Vashem “Yad Vashem Names Recover Campaign. Community Outreach Guide.

<http://www1.yadvashem.org/names/whycollect.html>

²⁰⁰ Guy Trebay, “Killing Fields of Vision: Was Cambodia's Genocide Just a Moment of Photographic History?” *The Village Voice* (June 3, 1997): 34

²⁰¹ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003), 119.

²⁰² Rachel Hughes, “The Subject Artifacts of Memory: Photographs from Cambodia's Genocide,” *Media Culture, and Society* 25 (2003).

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

exhibition of non-mainstream work, arguing that there was precedence for such a curatorial approach. The museum has in the past displayed criminal mug shots and photojournalist Gilles Peress's documentary shots of the Rwandan Massacres. The exhibition, *The Silence: Photographs by Gilles Peress*, held at MoMA from June 15 to August 1st, 1995, included photographs taken by Peress during his visit to Rwanda in 1994 when he witnessed the genocidal expulsion of the Tutsis. The exhibit included a United Nations Report on Rwanda, which is more contextualization than MoMA usually presents; however the exhibit remained "elliptical because there weren't captions to any of the photographs."²⁰⁴ According to Kismaric the disturbing photographs captured by Peress denounced the need for exact contextual definitions of names and geographical locations. When describing *The Silence* Kismaric explains that the images were obvious "You see piles of corpses. Do you need to know that it's in whatever place?"²⁰⁵ By omitting the detailed captions from the images, Peress's photographs from Rwanda lose their denotative force, which connects them to a real world event. The removal of the caption transforms the meaning of the photographic document into a symbolic image, a process by which the photograph is being asked to perform less as empirical evidence than as an artistic object. Walter Benjamin believed captions could help rescue the photograph "from the ravages of modishness and confer upon it a revolutionary use value."²⁰⁶ The museum curator, on the other hand, often withholds captions to disassociate the object from any context, a process which transforms it into art.

²⁰⁴ Susan Kismaric [Chief Curator of MoMA photography department] in discussion with the author. Tape recording, May 19, 2008. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1973), 107.

“Moralists who love photographs always hope that words will save the picture.”²⁰⁷
Sontag explains “The opposite approach to that of the museum curator who, in order to turn a photojournalist’s work into art, shows the photographs without their original captions”²⁰⁸

A fundamental difference divides *The Silence: Photographs by Gilles Peress* and *Photographs of S-21*. Gilles Peress, as an artist, consciously went out to document the atrocities of the Rwanda Genocide. The photographs taken of the S-21 portraits were created by a young obedient teenager, Nhem Ein, who was fearful of losing his own life if he didn’t meticulously document the execution of Khmer Rouge believed ‘enemies.’ MoMA was not aware of who the photographer of the portraits was when *Photographs of S-21* was exhibited, prompting them to include the label *Photographer Unknown* underneath the prints.²⁰⁹ Ein revealed himself to the international community in 1997²¹⁰ upon realizing that his prints had garnered Western critical praise. Craig S. Smith reported on September 18th, 1997, for the *Wall Street Journal* that Nhem Ein had emerged in the summer of 1997 in Phnom Penh, when the city was jammed with journalists, in hopes of receiving cash for his photographs. Smith believes that Ein is

Interested now in making money on the notoriety, albeit anonymous (the book and exhibit make no attribution), that these photographs have brought him in the

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Paul Williams, “Witnessing Genocide: Vigilance and Remembrance at Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 18 (2004): 244.

²¹⁰ David Nahas, “Haunting Images of Impending Death.” *The Critical State of Visual Art in New York Review* 15 (June 1-2, 1997).

West by selling his later work, images he took during the 1980s and early 1990s in Pol Pot's northern jungle stronghold.²¹¹

An adverse consequence of placing the S-21 photographs at the Museum of Modern Art is that Nhem Ein's ability to take excellent photographs became recognized. Kismaric believes that this is an "unfortunate interpretation" that is ultimately a "misunderstanding."²¹² The program instigated at Gallery Three was not about "sanctifying people as artists" but rather about addressing the "meaning of the medium."²¹³ To exhibit certainly called into question the meaning of the photographic medium, which cannot neatly be placed into categories dictating what constitutes art. As Kismaric attests:

Guy Trebay's problem was how dare you put these pictures in an art museum, but I would suggest that it has to do with the complicated history about the medium, and how one kind of photography influences the way another kind of photographer thinks. People who are making pictures for artistic purposes learn from photographers who are making them for practical reasons.²¹⁴

Cultural historian Mary Warner Marien notes that there has been a long history of blurred photographic genres. Pictures taken of war, such as those taken by Roger Fenton of the Crimean War were presented in art spaces. Similarly photographs taken by the Farm Security Administration, an organization initiated under President Roosevelt in 1935

²¹¹ C.S. Smith, "Profiting From His Shots of Pol Pot's Terror," *The Wall Street Journal* (September 6, 1997).

²¹² Susan Kismaric [Chief Curator of MoMA photography department] in discussion with the author. Tape recording, May 19th, 2008. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

which commissioned photographers to depict the dire situation of rural poverty in an effort to fight depression, have equally entered the discourse of western artistic photography.²¹⁵ Walker Evans, and Dorothea Lange, both members of the Farm Security Administration, are now celebrated American artists. Susan Sontag has argued that there is a risk that socially concerned photographers, like Evans and Lange, may see the revolutionary use value of their photographs usurped through artistic discourse. Sontag states,

Socially concerned photographers assume that their work can convey some kind of stable meaning, can reveal truth. But partly because the photograph is, always, an object in a context, this meaning is bound to drain away; that is, the context which shapes whatever immediate, in particular, political, uses the photograph may have is inevitably succeeded by contexts in which such uses are weakened and become progressively less relevant. One of the central characteristics of photography is that process by which original uses are modified, eventually supplanted by subsequent uses, most notably, by the discourses of art into which any photograph can be absorbed.²¹⁶

In his exhibition review of *Photographs from S-21* for the *New York Times*, Michael Kimmelman agrees that it is difficult to define strict borders isolating which photographs are appropriate for an art museum context. He writes, “Art museums...have long shown mug shots, not to mention war photos, crime-scene shots, and other kinds of documentary

²¹⁵ Mary Warner Marian, *Photography: A Cultural History*. 2nd Edition. (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2006), 410.

²¹⁶ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1973), 106.

pictures that aren't made strictly as art."²¹⁷ Kimmelman continues to explain that there is an historical artistic tradition of the mug shot, "Even mug shots," he writes, "notwithstanding their basic function as simple ID's have roots in artistic conventions as old as the Renaissance."²¹⁸ The photographic genre blurring has become even more pronounced in the later part of the twentieth century, as Marian points out,

In the past, image-makers, audiences, curators, and scholars had considered art photography, documentary photography, and photojournalism as having their own separate lines of development and different social agenda. By the late twentieth century, however, these distinct photographic genres were increasingly coming to resemble each other in style and subject.²¹⁹

At the turn of the twenty-first century it has become common practice to exhibit photographs of historical atrocities²²⁰, never created with the overt intention of being art, within art gallery spaces. In 2000 photographs of lynching's primarily taken of black men in America's South between the years of 1890-1930 drew large crowds to the Roth Horowitz Gallery in Manhattan for an exhibit entitled *Witness*.²²¹ The photographs depicting the lynchings were originally created as postcards that were used as souvenirs for participating audience members. (Figure 41) Notes written on the back of the postcards reveal the manner by which the gruesome imagery was incorporated into

²¹⁷ M. Kimmelman, "Hypnotized by Mug Shots That Stare Back: Are They Windows or Mirror?" *The New York Time* 27 Aug: C1 (1997).

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Mary Warner Marien, *Photography: A Cultural History*. 2nd Edition. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2006. P. 410.

²²⁰ Paul Williams has recently conducted research on the rise of memorial museums as institutional and cultural spaces forming collective remembrance. See his *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities* (Berg Publishers, 2008).

²²¹ *Witness* was exhibited at The Roth Horowitz Gallery in Manhattan from Jan. 13th to Feb.12th, 2000.

quotidian exchanges. Critic Nina Burleigh explains that “On the back of one, which depicts the charred, dangling corpse of a black man surrounded by a score of gawking white faces, a proud participant wrote in flowing cursive: “This is the barbecue we had last night. My picture is to the left with a cross over it. Your son Joe.”²²² James Allen, an Atlanta antique dealer, began collecting the postcards in the 1990s, eventually advertising them to Twin Palms Publishers, the same art publishing house that printed 100 of the S-21 photographs in the Killing Fields. Twin Palms would publish the lynching photographs in a book, “*Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*”, which served as the *Witness* exhibition catalogue. The controversial exhibition was subsequently picked up by the New York Historical society, where the photographs would be framed in more contextual material drawing an equally large audience as the museum’s publicity department notes it was the “biggest continuing attendance of any exhibition in years.”²²³

There are interesting parallels between *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* to *Photographs from S-21*. Andrew Roth, part founder of the Roth Horowitz gallery, went so far as to define a genre, which included the Cambodian S-21 images, alongside the lynching photographs. Roth argued that *Witness* belongs in the genre of other controversial photo exhibits that depict national atrocities, such as the recently postponed show at the Cooper Union of German soldiers' war crimes in World War II and the collection, exhibited in 1997 at MoMA, of Khmer Rouge photographs of

²²² Nina Burleigh, “Pictures From an Execution: An art gallery tries not to cause a “Sensation” with its new show.” *New York Magazine* (January 24, 2000).

²²³ Sarah Valdez, “American Object – exhibition – *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photographs in America*. *Art in America* (October 2000).

Cambodians about to be killed during the seventies genocide.”²²⁴ In both cases the displaying of the gruesome images in an art context created controversy among those who questioned the exploitive aspect of drawing large audiences to look at individuals on the brink of death. Twin Palms published books of both sets of atrocity images and recontextualized them as important evidence that must be witnessed by contemporary audiences.²²⁵ Critics and the public questioned Twin Palms’s motives. Critic Hilton Als wrote that “the usefulness of this project [*Without Sanctuary*]...escapes me.”²²⁶ In *Regarding the Pain of Others* Susan Sontag poses questions in reaction to *Without Sanctuary* which should be equally applied to *Photographs from S-21*: “What is the point of exhibiting these pictures? To awaken indignation? To make us feel “bad”; that is, to appall and sadden? To help us mourn? Are we the better for seeing these images? Do they actually teach us anything?”²²⁷ In both cases the use of the images required moral justifications from those who exhibited them. As Sarah Veldaz writes in her *Art in America* exhibition review of *Without Sanctuary*,

There seems to have been a need to justify using the images... And it would indeed seem gratuitous to display photographs of lynchings without any morally defensible purpose.²²⁸

Zelizer cites media critic Kiku Adatto when writing on the moral complexities of bearing witness to the world’s atrocities through the medium of photography. Adatto describes

²²⁴ Nina Burleigh, “Pictures From an Execution: An art gallery tries not to cause a “Sensation” with its new show.” *New York Magazine* (January 24, 2000).

²²⁵ C. Carr, “The Atrocity Exhibition” *The Village Voice* (March 21st, 2000).

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

²²⁷ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003), 91/92.

²²⁸ Sarah Valdez, “American Abject – exhibition – *Without Sanctuary*: Lynching Photographs in America. *Art in America* (October 2000).

our image-conscious culture as privileging the “artifice of the image”²²⁹, explaining that, “our culture blurs the distinction between realism and artifice almost to the vanishing point.”²³⁰ Zelizer believes that this raises moral questions in the act of bearing witness “not only for those whose tragedies are depicted but for the world that proclaims itself to witness their pain.” Zelizer asks “what does the act of bearing witness accomplish in the contemporary age? What role does the photographic depiction of atrocity fill, if not to stop atrocity from recurring?”²³¹ Whether a North American public is ready to consider the photographs of men being lynched from a tree, or S-21 prisoners being documented before their execution, art, can and should be debated, but the fact is that by sanctifying the images through purchases and exhibitions, art galleries such as the Museum of Modern Art are institutionally defining them for us.

The exhibition, *Photographs from S-21: 1975-1979*, calls into question the institutional function of the Museum of Modern Art. Susan Kismaric relied on the historical role of museum institutions as a guardian to preserve material artifacts when justifying MoMA’s purchasing of the 21 photographs. “I fundamentally believe in museums.” Kismaric says, “I believe that things should be preserved and within that super structure decisions have to be made, so it seems completely legitimate. I mean, should they just disappear?”²³² The S-21 photographs should certainly not disappear, and indeed global exposure of the photographs has helped to facilitate international remembrances of the Cambodian atrocity, an important act of ethical commemoration.

²²⁹ Zelizer, Barbie. *Remembering to Forget*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998. P. 212.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Susan Kismaric [Chief Curator of MoMA photography department] in discussion with the author. Tape recording, May 19th, 2008. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

However, if the Museum of Modern Art wishes to use the photographic medium to help raise consciousness about the world's atrocities, then their curatorial policy to remain apolitical becomes paradoxical. The complexities of blurred genres seen at the turn of the twenty-first century forces the Museum of Modern Art to reevaluate its function in society, and indeed the exhibit caused its "consciousness" to be "raised like everyone else's."²³³

²³³ Susan Kismaric [Chief Curator of MoMA photography department] in discussion with the author. Tape recording, May 19th, 2008. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

CHAPTER THREE

Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography: Facing Death: Portraits from Cambodia's Killing Fields and The Space of Silence

For the photography of atrocity, people want the weight of witnessing

Without the taint of artistry, which is equated with insincerity or more

contrivance.

Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*²³⁴

The controversial act of designating the S-21 photographs as 'art' extended throughout North American communities when the Photographic Resource Center at Boston University in collaboration with the Photo Archive Group organized a travelling exhibition including 100 of the selected S-21 prints. Entitled *Facing Death: Portraits from Cambodia's Killing Fields*, the exhibition travelled extensively throughout the United States and Canada²³⁵, arriving in Ottawa in 2000 where it was exhibited at the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography (CMCP).²³⁶ The Photo Archive group sent an exhibition proposal to the CMCP, which caught the attention of Assistant Curator Carol Payne who, in turn, brought the exhibition to the consideration of the Museum Director Martha Hanna and the exhibition committee. The CMCP exhibition committee

²³⁴ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003), 26.

²³⁵ The exhibition was featured at the Boston University's Photographic Resource Center from September 19th to November 17th 1997. It was then exhibited at University of Arizona's Center for Creative Photography from January 18th through March 1, 1998; at the California Museum of Photography at Riverside's California from April 4 through May 31, 1998; at the Museum of Photographic Arts, San Diego, from September 10 through November 5, 1998; at the Southeast Museum of Photography, Daytona Beach, from February 5th to May 7th, 1999; at the Spencer Museum of Art University of Kansas, Lawrence October 23rd, to December 5th, 1999.

²³⁶ The exhibit was held at the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography from October 6th, 2000 to January 14th, 2001.

decided that the provoking photographs should be exhibited in a thoughtful context alongside a concurrent thematic exhibition *The Space of Silence*, organized by CMCP curator Pierre Dessureault. Payne argued that there is a moral imperative to bear witness to this level of atrocity. “*Facing Death*” she later wrote, “tries to fulfill the moral imperative articulated by Primo Levi in his memories of Auschwitz: to tell the story, to bear witness.”²³⁷ Not all critics who attended the exhibition agreed with Payne, believing that the exhibition risked the aestheticization of genocide. This chapter draws on the scholarship of Geoffrey Batchen, Susan Sontag, and Barbie Zelizer as it explores the curatorial premise, programming decisions, and critical reception arising from the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography’s exhibition of the S-21 collection.

On October 6th 2000 *Facing Death: Portraits from Cambodia’s Killing Field* opened in an adjacent gallery to the thematic exhibition *The Space of Silence*. Both exhibits addressed the remembrance of genocide through the photographic medium, but used radically different techniques to do so. *The Space of Silence* presents the work of three artists who consciously employed the camera with artistic intentions to confront the enormity of psychological and material vestiges resultant of genocidal atrocities. The exhibition included the work of Jack Burman and Isaac Applebaum, two Canadian artists, whose contributions investigated the use of photography in representing the Holocaust, as well as Chilean-born, New York artist Alfredo Jaar, whose work dealt with the imagining of the Rwandan massacre.

²³⁷Carol Payne, “Unbearable Witness,” *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 163, no. 9 (2000), <http://www.cmaj.ca/cgi/content/full/163/9/1176-a>, 1178. Accessed April 6, 2009.

When Carol Payne proposed the *Facing Death* exhibition to the CMCP, she anticipated the divisive element surrounding the traveling exhibition, as critics elsewhere had denounced the exploitative potential of beautifying trauma. In her article, “Unbearable Witness,” Payne responds to critics by stating that,

Over the past four years, these tragic images have been brought to a wide public. Along the way, they have also engendered a good deal of controversy. Largely, critics have been concerned either that the exhibition diminishes the gravity of the subject by presenting the photographs as art or by reproducing them effectively replicates the Khmer Rouge’s subjugation of its victims.²³⁸

Payne counters these sentiments by stating her belief that,

[The exhibition] does neither. Instead, *Facing Death* informs a wide public about those atrocities and, equally, functions as a critique ... The exhibition acknowledges that photographs operate at a number of levels, not solely as aesthetic works (although art itself can be a powerful means of critique)²³⁹

In order to explore the various functions of photography, and disassociate the S-21 photographs from artistic photography, the CMCP created an exhibition design, like the Museum of Modern Art’s Gallery Three presentation, which set the photographs aside in a distinct space that visitors could choose to enter. The option to avoid entrance

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Ibid.

was viewed by Payne and the CMCP curatorial staff as the “more responsible way”²⁴⁰ of exhibiting the troubling images. The gallery included the presentation of 100 individual 25 x 25cm inch prisoner photographs²⁴¹, and an introductory text panel written by the Photo Archive Group.²⁴² In an effort to embed the photographs in the Tuol Sleng environment, the photographs were presented on the gallery wall alongside a selection of disturbing quotations gathered by the Photo Archive Group from interrogators and survivors of S-21. One interrogator quotation read:

I had him pay respect to me. I told him that if I asked him to say a single word to me, he had to say it.²⁴³

Another read:

Break them with the pressure of propaganda or break them with torture. Don't allow them to die; don't allow them to deteriorate to the point where it's no longer possible to question them.²⁴⁴

A responding quotation expressing the voice of prisoner cries:

²⁴⁰ Carol Payne, [Assistant Curator at CMCP from 1996-1998 and Art History Professor at Carleton University]. Interview by Jacqueline Sischy. Tape recording. June 5th, 2008. Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada.

²⁴¹ The 100 10 x10 inch (25.4 cm x 25.4 cm) photographs were framed and matted to 14 x 18 inches (35.56 cm x 45.72cm).

²⁴² The contents of the exhibition were organized by the Chris Riley, Director of the Photo Archive Group, New York. and Robert Seydel who curated the exhibition at The Photographic Resource Center, Boston. The contents included 100 framed photographs, two text panels, and the publication *The Killing Fields*, published by Twin Palms Publishers, November 1996. The insurance value for the travelling exhibition was \$50,000 and the participation fee was \$1,500 plus one way shipping.

²⁴³ Photo Archive Group (no date) “Text accompanying Facing Death Traveling Exhibition,” unpublished. Found in Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography archive in exhibition file for *Facing Death: Portraits of Cambodia's Killing Fields*. Exhibition held from October 6, 2000 until January 14th, 2001.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

I am lying here waiting to die. Reciting slogans: Long Live Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong, Long Live Comrade [Pol Pot], Long Live the Communist Party of Kampuchea!²⁴⁵

The political context of Cambodia in the 1970s was briefly described in the introductory text panel, which included a concise description of the Khmer Rouge reign, the Tuol Sleng Prison, and the systematic process by which the photographs were taken. It read,

From 1975 to 1979, Pol Pot led the Khmer Rouge in a reign of violence, fear, and brutality. The human costs of the revolution were horrific ... Upon arrival at S-21 the prisoners were photographed, tortured until they confessed to whatever crimes their captors charged them with, and then executed.²⁴⁶

In conjunction, The Photo Archive Group emphasized their own role in printing the negatives explaining that:

The photographic negatives were cleaned, catalogued and printed in 1994 by the Photo Archive Group, a non-profit organization founded by photojournalist Chris Riley and Doug Niven. Damage to negatives accounts for the black markings that appear on some of the prints. In an effort to make the images more accessible to the general public, the Photo Archive Group created two complete albums of proofs of all 6,000 images. One of these albums is kept in Cambodia at Tuol Sleng, and the other at Cornell University. The Photo Archive group

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

remains active in their work and commitment to uncovering as much as possible about the archives from S-21.²⁴⁷

The text panel's relatively limited historical and political analysis of Cambodia's Genocide and emphasis on Niven and Riley's role in saving the S-21 photographs for public consumption places the images within a colonial archetype whereby two western photo-journalists are privileged to plunder objects from a politically unstable location.²⁴⁸ The rescue mission is justified as allowing the material artifacts to be viewed by a larger public, which in reality refers to a western museum-going public. Rachel Hughes attests that the images presentation at MoMA, which is equally applicable to the CMCP, are like colonial spoils:

The Photographs from S-21 are of 'exotic' temporal, geographical and cultural origin ('year zero' Cambodia, the Cambodian genocide) and of unknown authorship and function. Their removal from Cambodia and appearance at MoMA was primarily due to the actions of two individual, expert collectors.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁷Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Douglas Niven and Christopher Riley first visited the Tuol Sleng Museum and its archive in 1993, and subsequently received permission by the Cambodia government to conduct their project entitled to The Photo Archive Group to clean, catalog and print negatives, 6000 of which lay in the archive for approximately 13 years before they were viewed by Niven and Riley. While two of six 100-print editions produced by the project remained in Cambodia the transfer of four editions out of Cambodia was conducted in hopes of safekeeping the photographs. Rachel Hughes argues in her article "The Abject Artifacts of Memory: Photographs from Cambodia's Genocide," that this safekeeping of the photos is in part attributable to the political uncertainty that followed the UN-sponsored Cambodian national election of May and June of 1993.

²⁴⁹ Rachel Hughes, "The Abject Artifacts of Memory: Photographs from Cambodia's Genocide," *Media Culture, and Society* 25 (2003):36.

The colonial narrative became contested as critics grappled with the dislocating of the prints from Tuol Sleng and subsequent CMCP installation. In her review of the exhibition, *National Post* correspondent Catherine Porter explains that:

There are no glass doors at the genocide museum in Phnom Penh. There are no expensive frames. The floors have not be recently polished ... There is nothing artistic about this place that 25 years ago became the Khmer's most notorious and unforgiving prison and torture center. There is nothing safe. It is hard to imagine a place more different from the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography in Ottawa. Where one is housed in barbed wire and corrugated iron, the other is made of glass. Where one is pinched between crumbling apartment buildings on a dirt road, the other sits neatly between the grand Château Laurier hotel and Parliament Hill. There are no limbless soldiers begging outside the doors exhibition. The man at the reception desk wears a suit; has never had a machete held to his throat.²⁵⁰

By highlighting the socio-economic disparities between Tuol Sleng's geographical location, and the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, Porter expresses a sentiment of unease in the presentation of the S-21 imagery within a gallery context. Curator of the *Space of Silence* exhibition Pierre Dessureault responded to such accusations by attempting to dissociate the S-21 photograph's role in Western culture from art. As Dessureault explained to reporter Molly Amoli K. Shinhat for the *Ottawa Express*:

²⁵⁰ Catherine Porter, "Khmer Rouge atrocity exhibition," *The National Post*, December 02, 2000, Page B7.

The S-21 photographs are here as documents. The last thing we want to do is turn them into works of art ... First of all, they were identification photographs. Then they became part of the (Tuol Sleng) Museum of Genocide (formally S-21) as a way of remembering, as a way also of identifying relatives, acquaintances who were lost. Now they have a third life which is this travelling exhibition – which uproots them completely and takes them into a Western culture.²⁵¹

The transfer of the photographs from Cambodia into a western museum environment raises poignant challenges regarding the photographic representation of victims of genocide. In order to address the sensitive imagery, the CMCP curatorial staff decided that *The Space of Silence* would offer an appropriate venue to address the remembrance of genocide by incorporating thought provoking works by contemporary artists. The artistic pieces could challenge viewers to question their interpretive methods for the S-21 imagery. Payne explains, “I kind of lobbied for [Facing Death] and when it was decided that it was going to be included it needed a kind of context and thoughtfulness.”²⁵² To complement both exhibitions the CMCP organized a panel discussion²⁵³ entitled *Genocide and the Collective Memory*, which addressed approaches

²⁵¹ Molly Amoli K. Shinhat, “Framing Death: Killing Fields captured on film,” *Ottawa Express*, November 23, 2000.

²⁵² Carol Payne, [Curator of Facing Death Exhibition at CMCP and Art History Professor at Carleton University]. Interview by Jacqueline Sischy. Tape recording. June 5th, 2008. Carleton University, Ottawa.

²⁵³ The panel discussion was held on Sunday November 26th at 2 pm to 4:30pm in the Auditorium of the National Gallery of Canada. It was moderated by Anna Maria Tremonti, journalist and co-host of CBC’s *The Fifth Estate*. The panelists included Frank Chalk, History professor at Concordia University and founding co-director of the Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies; Alfredo Jaar, artist; Vincent Lavoie, critic and photo historian; Michael R. Marrus, History professor and Dean of the School of Graduate Studies at the University of Toronto.

in global communities to bear witness to the horror of genocide.²⁵⁴ The panel included a presentation by artist Alfredo Jaar who, according to Payne, explored “the ethical debate on how we combine art, and the experience of art, and all the loaded questions of aesthetics with a kind of social activism.”²⁵⁵ The CMCP hoped the exhibition *Space of Silence* could explore “through specific instances of genocide, the power of art to depict the wrongs of our time.”²⁵⁶

The exhibition featured the work of Canadian artist, Isaac Applebaum, whose *Man Makes Himself* (1985) (Figure 42 and 43) explores photography’s ability to counter notions of racism within historical narration. Applebaum was born to Holocaust survivors on October 25, 1946, in Bergen-Belsen, the displaced person camp in Germany. His parents, originally from Warsaw²⁵⁷, survived German concentration camps in Poland and, as survivors, passed through Bergen-Belsen when it served as a refugee camp after the war.²⁵⁸ Applebaum’s father decided to leave Warsaw when an opportunity arose to go to Canada, due to his father’s claim to be a tailor.²⁵⁹ As a result of his own family history, Applebaum was inspired to create an artwork addressing the story of Jim Keegstra, a high school teacher in Alberta who was tried in the mid-1980s under section 319 of the

²⁵⁴ Exhibition Summary (no date), unpublished. Found in Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography archive in exhibition file for *The Space of Silence* exhibition held from October 6, 2000 until January 14, 2001.

²⁵⁵ Carol Payne, [Assistant Curator at CMCP from 1996-1998 and Art History Professor at Carleton University]. Interview by Jacqueline Sischy. Tape recording. June 5th, 2008. Carleton University, Ottawa.

²⁵⁶ Internal Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography program proposal. Found in Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography archive in exhibition file for *The Space of Silence* exhibition held from October 6, 2000 until January 14th, 2001.

²⁵⁷ Suzanne B. Rackover “The Holocaust Art of Gershon Iskowitz, Isaac Applebaum, and Yebouda Chaki: A Critical Approach in Relation to the Philosophical Writings of Emmanuel Levinas, Hannah Arendt, and Julia Kristeva” (MA thesis, Concordia University, 2003), 28.

²⁵⁸ Richard Rhodes, *Isaac Applebaum* (Montreal: Centre Saidye Bronfman, 1991), 12.

²⁵⁹ Suzanne B. Rackover “The Holocaust Art of Gershon Iskowitz, Isaac Applebaum, and Yebouda Chaki: A Critical Approach in Relation to the Philosophical Writings of Emmanuel Levinas, Hannah Arendt, and Julia Kristeva” (MA thesis, Concordia University, 2003), 28.

Criminal Code of Canada²⁶⁰ for teaching an anti-Semitic construction of history to his students. For his work, *Man Makes Himself*, Applebaum accumulated material artifacts surrounding Keegstra's much publicized 1984 trial for inciting racial hatred.²⁶¹ The piece includes a lithographic reproduction of a portrait of Keegstra leaving the courthouse that Applebaum found in an Alberta newspaper (Figure 44) and a selection of Keegstra's student's notes presented in the trial.²⁶² Richard Rhodes describes the effective presentation of the trial within Applebaum's artwork:

Keegstra's racist and anti-Semitic teachings show themselves plainly in a xeroxed copy made by Applebaum of a notebook kept by three of his students, all members of one family. The young, still awkward handwriting that fills page after page shows the corruptive nature of Keegstra's racism better than any news report or editorial published at the time.²⁶³

In order to highlight the power of a photograph to empirically aid the narration of history, Applebaum juxtaposes the book of Keegstra's student's notes with a book including photographs of death camps, drastically altering the meaning of each in the process. The book containing concentration camp photographs was given to Applebaum by his parents who received the memorial document upon liberation of Bergen-Belsen.²⁶⁴ The CMCP text panel describes the archival book as "stained,

²⁶⁰ Ibid, 29.

²⁶¹ Mercer Union: A Center for Contemporary Art, "Man Makes Himself," Archives for Mercer Union: A Center for Contemporary Art, http://mercerunion.org/show.asp?show_id=417. Accessed April 6, 2009.

²⁶² Suzanne B. Rackover "The Holocaust Art of Gershon Iskowitz, Isaac Applebaum, and Yebouda Chaki: A Critical Approach in Relation to the Philosophical Writings of Emmanuel Levinas, Hannah Arendt, and Julia Kristeva" (MA thesis, Concordia University, 2003), 28.

²⁶³ Richard Rhodes, *Isaac Applebaum* (Montreal: Centre Saidye Bronfman, 1991), 12.

²⁶⁴ The Bergen-Belsen camp was first established in 1940 south of the small towns of Bergen and Belsen, about 11 miles north of Celle, Germany. Until 1943, Bergen-Belsen was a prisoner of war camp.

yellowed pages illustrated with grainy, blurred photographs of death camps.”²⁶⁵ The images, framed with captions in German, Hebrew, and English were confiscated from German camp guards and officials.²⁶⁶ Applebaum juxtaposes the death camp imagery with Keegstra’s lecture notes. Here, the photographs of the death camps are meant to act as empirical evidence, proving that the countless murders took place and subsequently denouncing Keegstra’s beliefs. Richard Rhodes aptly describes the importance Applebaum places on the photographic representation of the concentration camps to counter Holocaust denial:

Applebaum’s parents survived German concentration camps in Poland and he knows that more is at stake here than intellectual arguments. Real people suffer when such ideas are enacted.²⁶⁷

In order to explore the ideological effects of racism, Applebaum’s installation includes a series of 10 black and white portraits²⁶⁸ of unidentified Canadians of Chinese descent, which were taken by Applebaum in Toronto’s Chinatown (Figure 45). In direct opposition to these portraits hangs portraits of Caucasian males whose upper bodies often appear unclothed in playful positions (Figure 46). The combination of the portraits with Keegstra’s trial notes provokes a plethora of interpretations for the ambiguous

Throughout its existence, the camp included eight sections: a prisoner camp, two camps for women, a special camp, a neutrals camp, the star camp, a Hungarian camp, and a tent camp. Bergen-Belsen also served as a collection camp for sick and injured prisoners transported from other concentration camps. Bergen-Belsen closed when it was liberated by the British forces on April 15th, 1945.

²⁶⁵ Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography text panel for Isaac Applebaum installation *Man Makes Himself* (2000), unpublished. Found in Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography archive in exhibition file for *The Space of Silence* exhibition held from October 6, 2000 until January 14th, 2001

²⁶⁶ Richard Rhodes, *Isaac Applebaum* (Montreal: Centre Saidy Bronfman, 1991), 12.

²⁶⁷ Richard Rhodes, *Isaac Applebaum* (Montreal: Centre Saidy Bronfman, 1991), 12.

²⁶⁸ When *Man Makes Himself* was originally exhibited in 1985 at the Mercer Union Gallery in Toronto, only eight portraits were included.

installation. John Bentley Mayes responded to *Man Makes Himself* at the Mercer Union Gallery in 1985 for Toronto's *Global and Mail* by expressing his view that the portraits of Caucasian and Chinese individuals alongside remnants of Keegstra's trials broadens the meaning of the show.²⁶⁹ The photographs of the lighthearted Caucasian men frolicking in theatrical positions viewed against the portraits of somber Chinese faces challenges the audience to consider racial stereotypes. John Bentley Mayes explains,

The contrast between the almost sullen impenetrability of the Chinese faces, and the personable, happy-go-lucky Caucasians is the contrast between displacement and privilege, imprisonment in stereotypes and the freedom to at enjoyed by those who make the stereotypes.²⁷⁰

Suzanne Rackover, who critically explored the work in her thesis *The Holocaust Art of Gershon Iskowitz, Isaac Applebaum, and Yebouda Chaki: A Critical Approach in Relation to the Philosophical Writings of Emmanuel Levinas, Hannah Arendt, and Julia Kristeva* strengthens the link between Applebaum's depictions of Canadians of Chinese descent with the artist's Jewish identity by comparing the sociopolitical dimensions in Canada's historical treatment of Chinese individuals with the legal discrimination placed on Jews in Nazi Germany. Rackover notes:

Although Applebaum may identify with the white males because he also occupies a place of privilege and is free to act and think as he wishes, the portraits of the men and women of Chinese descent are strong reminders that

²⁶⁹ John Bentley Mays, "Isaac Applebaum and Michael Balfe: Photographic Installations, at Mercer Union," *The Globe and Mail*, 7 February 1985, E-4.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

just one generation earlier his parents had been displaced persons, discriminated against and marked for death because of their ancestry. In light of the above statement, it is clear that the Chinese faces could just as easily been Jewish faces fifty years earlier. This juxtaposition is particularly appropriate because the restrictions placed on the Chinese in Canada, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries mirror those placed on the Jews in Nazi Germany prior to World War II.²⁷¹

Applebaum's work provides a model of reception whereby viewers are asked to trust the medium of photography as a force that can challenge racist social constructions. The CMCP curatorial presentation emphasized photography's role in confronting historical narration of atrocities by heading the text panel accompanying *Man Makes Himself* with a quote provided by Primo Levi from *The Drowned and the Saved* which retells a speech given by an SS officer to new arrivals at Auschwitz:

However this war may end, we have won the war against you; none of you will be left to bear witness, but even if someone were to survive, the world will not believe him. There will always be suspicions, discussions, research by historians, but there will be no certainties, because we will destroy the evidence along with you. And even if some proof should remain and some of you survive, people will say that the events you describe are too monstrous to be believed: they will say that they are exaggerations of Allied propaganda and will believe

²⁷¹ Here Rackover is referring to the treatment of Chinese within Canadian history starting with the 1860s when the economic situation in Canada (particularly British Columbia where the majority of Chinese immigrants resided) became stagnant the Chinese population became scapegoats for the unemployment problem. Ultimately legislation was enacted to restrict occupational competition, limit immigration and revoke their rights of citizenship.

us, who will deny everything, and not you. We will be the one to dictate the history of the Lagers.²⁷²

Applebaum's installation counters the SS officer's tirade by proving it to be false, and highlights the importance of bearing witness to genocidal history. In writing on the significance of photographic depictions of concentration camps, Barbie Zelizer states that,

Twentieth-century Western accounts of atrocity have evolved in conjunction with broader notions about truth telling, making the act of testifying against atrocities one of the paramount political acts of this century.²⁷³

Zelizer believes that:

Photographs are of particular importance here, for the act of giving testimony against atrocity tends to go beyond the mere authentication of horror and to imply the act of bearing witness, by which we assume responsibility for the events of our times.²⁷⁴

By presenting the evidential might of photographic records and countering notions of racism, *Man Makes Himself* evokes the moral responsibility to bear witness.

Jack Burman's installation, *Remain Silent: Auschwitz-Birkenau* (Figure 47) considers the role of memory in recalling the great loss and vestiges of genocide. The title

²⁷² Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography text panel for Isaac Applebaum installation *Man Makes Himself* (2000), unpublished. Found in Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography archive in exhibition file for *The Space of Silence* exhibition held from October 6, 2000 until January 14th, 2001.

²⁷³ Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 10.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

of the piece is a translation of the Nazi orders which were stenciled in black letters in the walls in the concentration camps latrines, “Verhalte dich ruhig.”²⁷⁵ The installation included large photographic landscapes of Auschwitz-Birkenau (1994-1997), where the ruins of a destructive history remain. The concentration camp, Auschwitz, was established in Poland in the spring of 1940, and in the winter of 1941-42 the camp was joined to the neighboring hamlet of Birkenau.²⁷⁶ Auschwitz-Birkenau became a notorious death camp where groups considered “degenerate races,” in particular Jews, Gypsies, and Slavs, were incinerated.²⁷⁷ Jack Burman explains that “Over three years some 1.4 million women, men, and children were incinerated in Birkenau’s open pits and crematoria.”²⁷⁸ Almost fifty years after the camp’s liberation in 1945, Burman went to visit what remained of the concentration camp. He responded by creating the striking photographic landscapes in *Remain Silent: Auschwitz/Birkenau*. As Burman explains:

In January and February of 1994 I saw 5 or 6 people there, 2 Polish guards, a labourer, and a few locals walking their dogs. Freight trains pulled in all night past the train-station hotel. The first sound in each pre-dawn was of horsedrawn carts. A few of the images on these walls were made at Auschwitz; most at

²⁷⁵ Johanna Mizgala, “Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, The Space of Silence and Facing Death: Portraits from Cambodia’s Killing Fields,” *Archivaria* Vol. 50. (Fall 2000): 170

²⁷⁶ Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography text panel for Jack Burman installation *Silent: Auschwitz-Birkenau* (2000), unpublished. Found in Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography archive in exhibition file for *The Space of Silence* exhibition held from October 6, 2000 until January 14th, 2001.

²⁷⁷ Jack Burman text accompanied *Remain Silent: Auschwitz/Birkenau* sent to Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, unpublished. Found in Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography archive in exhibition file for *The Space of Silence* exhibition held from October 6, 2000 until January 14th, 2001.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

Birkenau. The images are often ‘empty’. That is how I could see the women and children and men best.²⁷⁹

The tranquility of the empty landscape forces the viewer to ponder the loss of human lives. Reviewer of the *Space of Silence* exhibit Johanna Mizgala noted that, “By way of serenely beautiful panoramic photographs ... Burnham seeks to capture the profound hush of loss.”²⁸⁰ The desolate emptiness of the images prompts viewers to imagine the murdered people, who are no longer able to inject life into the tableau. By omitting gory depictions of the concentration camps, the large photographs of beautiful landscapes invite one to envision horror, which may evoke a stronger effect of lament than the overt visualization of death. The CMCP’s text panel for Burman’s work presents a beautiful quote written by Jean Cayrol for his post WWII film *Nuit et Brouillard* (1955).²⁸¹ Cayrol survived the Gusen concentration camp and subsequently examined the dichotomy between serene landscapes, and gruesome concentration camps in his film:

Even a peaceful landscape, even a harvested field with crows flying overhead and smouldering grass fires, even a road travelled by cars and farmers and families, even a village perfect for holidays, with its market place and church spire all can lead, quite simply, to a concentration camp.²⁸²

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Johanna Mizgala, “Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, The Space of Silence and Facing Death: Portraits from Cambodia’s Killing Fields,” *Archivaria* Vol. 50. (Fall 2000): 170.

²⁸¹ Jean Cayrol (1911-2005) was a French poet, filmmaker and publisher who was a member of the Academie Goncourt. Cayrol joined the French Resistance in 1941, and was consequently arrested and sent to the Gusen concentration camp in 1943. Cayrol survived and continued to create essays, poetry, and films, many of which dealt with themes surrounding remembrance, and trauma linked to his experience in the WW2.

²⁸² Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography text panel for Jack Burman installation *Remain Silent: Auschwitz-Birkenau* (2000), unpublished. Found in Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography

The duality of images of tranquil landscapes and the horror of their pasts becomes even more intricate due to the presentation style of the prints. Burman's photographs are grand, colourful, and technically magnificent. Consequently, *Remain Silent: Auschwitz-Birkenau* forces one to consider how the aesthetically pleasing photographic medium can truly convey gruesome horror.

In a similar vein, Alfredo Jaar questions the power of the photograph in revealing the true repulsion of genocide in his work *Real Pictures* (Figure 47). Jaar first travelled to Rwanda in the summer of 1994 while the genocide was still ongoing, and shot over 3,000 images during his stay.²⁸³ Jaar became concerned that the oversaturation of images from the Rwanda series would "dilute the magnitude of the events and the photograph would lose its ability to provide change."²⁸⁴ Consequently, Jaar chose to present a series of single eight by ten photographs in black boxes concealing them from view. The viewer must rely solely on Jaar's descriptive captions printed in white text outside the boxes, and thus imagine what the photographs inside the boxes reveal. The textual narratives are based on Jaar's experiences while taking the photographs and subsequent research with his subjects. For example, he tells the story of Gete Emerita, a thirty-year-old survivor of the Rwanda massacres in one textual aid to a box:

Gutete Emerita, 30 years old, is standing in front of the church. Dressed in modest, worn clothing, her hair is hidden in faded pink cotton kerchief. She was attending mass in the church when the massacre began. Killed with machetes, in

archive in exhibition file for *The Space of Silence* exhibition held from October 6, 2000 until January 14th, 2001.

²⁸³ Johanna Mizgala, "Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, The Space of Silence and Facing Death: Portraits from Cambodia's Killing Fields," *Archivaria* Vol. 50. (Fall 2000): 172.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

front of her eyes, were her husband Tito Kahinamura (40) and her two sons Muhoza (10) and Matirigari (7). Somehow, she managed to escape with her daughter Marie-Louise Unamararunga (12), and hid in a swamp for three weeks, only coming out at night for food. When she speaks about her lost family, she gestures to corpses on the ground, rotting in the African sun.²⁸⁵

By concealing the photographic imagery and relying on written captions to describe the depicted horrors Jaar implicitly places the written language above photography as a more powerful aid in relaying the world's atrocities. Critic Johanna Mizgala believes that, "*Real Pictures* is the result of Jaar's exploration of the power of words over images."²⁸⁶ Jaar worked on the Rwanda project for six years between 1994 and 1996 eventually creating twenty-one pieces in the series. Jaar explains his process,

I ended up doing twenty-one pieces in those six years. Each one was an exercise of representation. And how can I say this? They all failed. But I learned from each. And I used the lessons from one exercise in the next.²⁸⁷

Jaar's strategies varied from the concealed images in black boxes to a more intimate portrait of the young woman, Gutete Emirta, in *The Eyes of Gutete Emerita*. This work presents close-up images of Emirta's eyes through two quadvision lightboxes with six black –and white text transparencies and two colour transparencies. A textual description explaining that Gutete was standing in front of a church where 400 Tutsi men, children

²⁸⁵ Olivier Chow, "*Alfredo Jaar and the Post-Traumatic Gaze*." Tate's Online Research Papers. Spring, 2008. <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/tatepapers/08spring/chow.shtm>

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Art in the twenty-first century. PBS, 2001-2007, <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/jaar/clip1.html>

and men were killed, accompanies the image.²⁸⁸ Jaar explains that he focused on the individual life of Gutete in order to help personalize the immense scale of genocide. Jaar explains,

When we say one million dead, it's meaningless. So the strategy was to reduce the scale to a single human being with a name, a story. That helps the audience to identify with that person. And this process of identification is fundamental to create empathy, solidarity, and intellectual involvement. So that's what this piece is about. The text at the entrance tells you a story and here we have the visual articulation of that story. I'm trying always to create a balance between information and spectacle, between content and the visuals.²⁸⁹

Susan Sontag reflects on the work of socially concerned writers who in the past, like Jaar, wish to surround photographs with textual analysis to help bring awareness to the world's violence without detaching the experience into an aesthetic experience. Sontag explains:

Socially concerned writers have not taken to cameras, but they are often enlisted, or volunteer, to spell out the truth to which photographs testify, as James Agee did in the texts he wrote to accompany Walker Evans's photographs in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, or as John Berger did in his essay on the photograph of the dead Che Guevara, this essay being in effect an extended caption, one that attempts to firm up the political associations and moral

²⁸⁸ Alfredo Jaar. 2008. <http://www.alfredojaar.net/index1.html> . Accessed April 6, 2009.

²⁸⁹ Art in the twenty-first century. PBS,2001-2007, <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/jaar/clip1.html> Accessed April 6, 2009.

meaning of a photograph that Berger found too satisfying aesthetically, too suggestive iconographically.²⁹⁰

In contrast to James Agee's and John Berger's textual analysis of imagery, Alfredo Jaar's decision to conceal the images from Rwanda nullifies photography's power, even with textual aid, to provide moral meaning to the museum visitors who are far removed from the lived experience of genocide.

The disconnection between the real world experience of the Rwandan massacre and the replication of the events through photography inspired Jaar's work. As Jaar explains:

For me, what was important was to record everything I saw around me, and to do this as methodically as possible. In these circumstances a 'good photograph' is a picture that comes as close as possible to reality. But the camera never manages to record what the eyes see, or what you feel at the moment. The camera always creates a new reality. I have always been concerned with the disjunction between experience and what can be recorded photographically.²⁹¹

Jaar's work investigates the limitations in a photograph's potential to truly convey the trauma of genocide. The emotional detachment photographic replication of atrocity creates, which Jaar explores in *Real Pictures*, was described by Sontag in *On Photography* as she stated her critique of the medium: "despite the illusion of given

²⁹⁰ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1973), 111.

²⁹¹ Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography text panel for Alfredo Jaar installation *Real Pictures* (2000), unpublished. Found in Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography archive in exhibition file for *The Space of Silence* exhibition held from October 6, 2000 until January 14th, 2001.

understanding, what seeing through photographs really invites is an acquisitive relation to the world that nourishes aesthetic awareness and promotes emotional detachment.”²⁹²

The various artistic approaches to documenting genocide presented in the *Space of Silence* exhibition probed viewers to question photography’s ability to relay trauma. In this sense, Payne believes that the exhibition provided an appropriate structure to frame the S-21 images:

I can’t imagine doing the Tuol Sleng exhibition without something like [*Space of Silence*]. I was extremely moved by what Pierre Dessureault put together. They did many complex things that artists do, but one of the things they did was ... they gave us models, ways to explore the other exhibition, and also prepare you for your own response to it.²⁹³

The S-21 photographs, unlike the images presented in *The Space of Silence*, were never consciously created to be ‘art’, and as such the presentation of the images alongside artistic photographs of genocide raises salient questions about the nature of photography. Payne recalls that:

[visitors who] came to our space saw that there was an art exhibition, and then was this strange sort of sociological thing, and it was a way of saying very

²⁹² Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1973), 111.

²⁹³ Carol Payne, [Assistant Curator at CMCP from 1996-1998 and Art History Professor at Carleton University]. Interview by Jacqueline Sischy. Tape recording. June 5th, 2008. Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada.

loudly that photography functions in a lot of ways in the world not just as art, and that we need to seriously look at and critique these other ways.²⁹⁴

The presentation of S-21 images in a gallery context expands the discourse of photography and in doing so it presents challenges to the North American critic. How should the S-21 photographs be critiqued? Should they be critiqued as art, whereby the formal attributes of the print are examined? Should critics talk about the sociological element of KR's desire to systematically document their believed enemies through the camera? Should critics write about the lives of the victims in the portraits? How should the S-21 photographs be defined; are they visual emblems of atrocity, individual portraits, material artifacts, historical evidential material? These questions were addressed throughout North America as museum audiences and art critics reflected on the *Space and Silence* and *Facing Death* exhibitions.

Art critics approached the S-21 images with consternation explaining that the aesthetically pleasing portraits created a difficult paradox. "Images are rarely this challenging, this nakedly horrible and beautiful at the same time,"²⁹⁵ Kyo Maclear declared in his exhibition review for *Saturday Night* in Toronto. Sandra Abma, the arts reporter for CBC radio addressed the paradoxical nature of the images in her assessment that "the photographs are at the same time chilling, disturbing, and beautiful."²⁹⁶ Johanna

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Kyo Maclear. "Pictures at an execution: a new exhibit of harrowing photos was never meant to hang in a gallery. Does it belong in one? [Facing Death: Portraits from Cambodia's Killing Fields at the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography in Ottawa]. *Saturday Night*. Toronto. Vol. 115, Iss. 22 (Oct 7 2000): 16

²⁹⁶ Sandra Abma, "Powerful exhibit revisits killing fields of Cambodia and Nazi death camps" Visual Arts and Desire, CBC Entertainment. Press release found in Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography

Mizgala noted that the large format of the prints in a gallery context made her uneasy. In her review for *Archivaria* she wrote,

Facing Death: Portraits from Cambodia's Killing Fields is troubling on many levels, not only in terms of subject matter, but also in terms of presentation. The original method of dissemination for the discovered negatives was in passport-sized prints stapled to a case file; they were not conceived to be reproduced in a large format on a museum wall.²⁹⁷

Art critics attempted to describe the formal attributes of the portraits, like that of any painting, or photograph. Dominique Nahas wrote,

What you see are stares of serenity, dignity, terror, incomprehension. Each person is standing alone or handcuffed to other blindfolded prisoners, has, with two exceptions, a number tag pinned to his/her shirts ... These prisoners are photographed against neutral backgrounds.²⁹⁸

Kyo Maclear describes the physical beauty of one of the photographed men in his review:

archive in exhibition file for *The Space of Silence* exhibition held from October 6, 2000 until January 14th, 2001.

²⁹⁷ Johanna Mizgala, "Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, The Space of Silence and Facing Death: Portraits from Cambodia's Killing Fields," *Archivaria* Vol. 50. (Fall 2000): 171.

²⁹⁸ David Nahas, "Haunting Images of Impending Death" *The Critical State of Visual Art in New York Review* 15 (June 1-2, 1997).

In the picture his eyebrows are thin, and arched like a woman's, his clean black hair swept to the side, his cheeks smooth and hairless. He looks at us, a young man. A beautiful man.²⁹⁹

The reviews often included short, dramatic sentences akin to Maclear's writing style to emphasize the tragedy of the imagery. For example, Andre Welsh Huggins, reviewer for the *Toronto Star* focuses on the facial expression of a woman holding her sleeping child:

The woman in the black-and white photograph holds a sleeping baby in her right arm. She stares at the camera, resigned, defeated. It is May, 1978.³⁰⁰

Paul Gessell reviewer for the *Ottawa Citizen* wrote:

The eyes in the photos are unforgettable. Some are defiant. Some are vacant. Many are pained and simply bewildered. Stare into those eyes and you see entire lives flashing before you.³⁰¹

Critics attempted through verbose language to express the emotional turmoil prompted by the exhibition. Molly Amoli K. Shinhat describes her reaction in her review for *Ottawa Express*,

The images send out tidal waves of anxiety and something akin to vertigo. I can see the eyes of the man, woman, child and, in one case, baby often staring

²⁹⁹ Kyo Maclear, "Pictures at an execution: a new exhibit of harrowing photos was never meant to hang in a gallery. Does it belong in one? [Facing Death: Portraits from Cambodia's Killing Fields at the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography in Ottawa]. *Saturday Night*. Toronto. Vol.115, Iss. 22 (Oct 7 2000): 16

³⁰⁰ Andrew Welsh-Huggins, "Exhibition puts a human face on genocide" *The Toronto Star* (April 20, 2000).

³⁰¹ Paul Gessell, "Looking into the eyes of death: Exhibit showcases haunting photos of Cambodians just before executions." *The Ottawa Citizen*, October 5, 2000.

wildly into the camera the knowledge of the finality awaiting them. The numbers around their necks, the unkempt clothes, the bruises of scares and torture. As a viewer, it's impossible to know how soon death came and in what form.³⁰²

The sensational writing can be contrasted with articles emphasizing the history of the Tuol Sleng prison, and the need to clearly express the lack of artistry in the images. As Carol Squiers wrote for *American Photo*, "They stare at you as hauntingly as any portrait ever taken, but these pictures weren't made with artistic intentions."³⁰³

Critics used various approaches to communicate the challenging photographs, but the descriptions all fall short of truly describing the disturbing effect of the images, and some believed the written description of the physical attributes of the genocidal documents denounced the severity of their context. Guy Trebay wrote in the *Village Voice* that:

The Cambodian dead are held up for consideration in the cool light of formalist concerns. That, at least, is a charge being leveled at the Museum of Modern Art.³⁰⁴

Carol Payne similarly criticized MoMA as an appropriate rhetorical framework for the images stating that,

³⁰² Molly Amoli K. Shinhat, "Framing Death: Killing Fields captured on film," *Ottawa Express*, November 23, 2000.

³⁰³ Carol Squiers, "Perspectives Faces of the Killing Field." *American Photo*, Nov./Dec.1994.

³⁰⁴ Guy Trebay, "Killing Fields of Vision: Was Cambodia's Genocide Just a Moment of Photographic History?" *The Village Voice* (June 3, 1997): 34.

Personally I find MoMA as a location problematic... putting something in that space cloaks it in the rhetoric of high modernism. To put this in the space along with everything John Szarkowski, Peter Galassi³⁰⁵, and everybody else has shown, is as if to look for formal patterns in these photographs and that's kind of grotesque.³⁰⁶

Understandably, critics feared that strict formal readings of the imagery might be inappropriate given of the gruesome subject matter of the images, but photography itself is a visual medium, and by omitting visual interpretation of the imagery, a large portion of the photograph's meaning is neglected within the critique. Consequently, Payne "feels two ways about" reading the images formally, explaining that "On the one hand, I think it's troubling to talk about them purely formally."³⁰⁷ On the other hand, Payne believes that one thing "art history and the language of art history gives us is a way to think visually very closely."³⁰⁸ In this sense it is important to adopt an art historical framework for analysis of the S-21 photographs. Payne notes that "if we have historians looking at these photographs they are not going to be looking as closely."³⁰⁹

The S-21 photographs defy easy interpretative categorization. They do not fit neatly into the discipline of art history as Nhem Ein and the KR forces clearly weren't using the photographic medium with artistic ambitions, and yet when the images are

³⁰⁵ John Sarkowski (1925-2007) was the Director of Photography at New York's Museum of Modern Art from 1962 to 1991, when he was succeeded by Peter Galassi (1951-).

³⁰⁶ Carol Payne, [Assistant Curator at CMCP from 1996-1998 and Art History Professor at Carleton University]. Interview by Jacqueline Sischy. Tape recording. June 5th, 2008. Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

placed into the rhetoric of historical study, as seen in Cornell University's archival presentation, the wealth of information that could be disclosed through visual analysis is neglected. The interdisciplinary nature of the S-21 images speaks to larger methodological problems in writing photography's history. Geoffrey Batchen explains that, "Those of us interested in providing an appropriate historical framework for photography are faced with a veritable mountain of methodological problems."³¹⁰ Photography's "variety and self-effacing ubiquity" have, according to Batchen, "made it an elusive historical entity, defying traditional interpretative or narrative structures."³¹¹

By including the S-21 images within a gallery context, curators of *Photographs from S-21*, and *Facing Death* were reflexive in their hopes to expand the discourse of photographic history. Both Kismaric and Payne emphasized their curatorial desire to situate the S-21 imagery within a larger framework of photography's historical narrative. In a response to critic Guy Trebay, who denounced the images displayed at MoMA, Kismaric explained that the show was there "to tell the story of the history of photography."³¹² Kismaric believed that critics like Trebay didn't grasp the obstacles of photography's history, explaining that Trebay "wouldn't listen to me about the notion of the complications of photographic history, and how commercial work and all kinds of vernacular work have always been part of photographic history."³¹³ Batchen has argued that, within the twentieth century, vernacular photographs have largely been neglected

³¹⁰ Geoffrey Batchen, "Camera Lucida: Another Little History of Photography," in *The Meaning of Photography (Clark Studies in the Visual Arts)*, edited by Robin Kelsey and Blake Stimson. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008) 76.

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Guy Trebay, "Killing Fields of Vision: Was Cambodia's Genocide Just a Moment of Photographic History?" *The Village Voice* (June 3, 1997): 34.

³¹³ Susan Kismaric [Chief Curator of MoMA photography department] in discussion with the author. Tape recording, May 19, 2008. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

from photographic discourse, which has focused predominately on the artistic aspiration of the medium. In his book, *Each Wild Idea: Writing, Photography, History* Batchen explains that,

It is not difficult to understand why vernacular photographs have attracted so little attention in the traditional account of photography's history. Although historical accounts of photography written in the nineteenth or early twentieth century tend to include an eclectic selection of photographs, throughout the twentieth century, most histories tenaciously focused on the artistic ambition of the medium, excluding all other genres except as they complement a formalist art-historical narrative.³¹⁴

Payne, who had reservations about the placement of the S-21 photographs at MoMA proposed that the CMCP's institutional mandate to explore the cultural history of photography rendered it a more appropriate venue. Payne explains:

I have less of a problem with CMCP because it does have a mandate to show things like journalistic images, things like governmental images, it doesn't do a lot of that, it's mainly an art space, but it's some of its mandate. And I must say that it's something that I was interested in inching it towards. I'm interested in

³¹⁴ Geoffrey Batchen, *Each Wild Idea: Writing, Photography, History*.(Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2001.), 57.

photo studies, like a lot of photo studies scholars, in looking at a more interdisciplinary and prosaic kind of photograph and historically grounding it.³¹⁵

Geoffrey Batchen believes that the desire amongst photographic historians to widen the discourse and expand an interpretative structure for photography, which could appropriately include its many manifestations, is a challenge currently facing the discipline. In his essay, “Camera Lucida: Another Little History of Photography,” Batchen poses questions concerning the difficulties that arise when one attempts to form a neat methodology for photographic interpretation. Batchen asks:

How do you write a history for something that escapes easy definition, has no discernable boundaries, and operates on the principle of reflection (how, for example, do you separate a photograph from what it’s of or from the unfolding context of its reception)? How do you invent a voice (or voices) for this history that can speak to photography’s emotional effects as well as its physical and formal characteristics and economic and political ramifications? How can you speak of and from a local position and yet encompass photography’s global reach? How can you incorporate the many different ways that photography has been used and understood around the world, as well as the different photographies that circulate within our own culture? These questions collectively constitute the problem that now faces our discipline: the need for a systemic transformation of the way the history of photography is represented

³¹⁵ Carol Payne, [Assistant Curator at CMCP from 1996-1998 and Art History Professor at Carleton University]. Interview by Jacqueline Sischy. Tape recording. June 5th, 2008. Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada.

such that this history can, for the first time, engage with photography in all of its many aspects and manifestations.³¹⁶

The methodological obstacle Batchen isolates within the photographic discipline speaks directly to the interpretative problems in categorizing the S-21 photographs. How does one adequately explore the emotional effects of the S-21 imagery while equally accounting for their political ramifications? How does one analyze the installation of the photographs within their localized gallery contexts, while simultaneously accounting for the meaning of their global circulation? Furthermore, do the intentions of the photographer, Nhem Ein, and the Khmer Rouge forces help shape the photographs' meaning? If so, how can one account for their exhibition function vis-a-vis the artistic photographic representation of genocide as seen in Applebaum's, Jaar's and Burman's work?

Susan Sontag has written that "The photographer's intentions do not determine the meaning of the photograph, which will have its own career, blown by the whims and loyalties of the diverse communities that have use for it."³¹⁷ Thirty years after the Cambodian Genocide took place; one needs to ask what use North American communities have for the S-21 imagery. Are we asking them to narrate the history of the Khmer Rouge? To let us bear witness to the atrocities? To remember the victims? Carol Payne believes the point of the exhibition...

³¹⁶ Geoffrey Batchen, "Camera Lucida: Another Little History of Photography," in *The Meaning of Photography (Clark Studies in the Visual Arts)*, edited by Robin Kelsey and Blake Stimson. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008) 76.

³¹⁷ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003), 39.

is to make us all bear witness and to feel this. The ethical debate is, is it becoming spectacular or does it work to create awareness in an incredibly visceral way?³¹⁸

The debate as to whether photographic representation of foreign atrocities helps inform a social consciousness or simply desensitizes the viewer through aesthetic distance, has been ongoing in the work of cultural critics Susan Sontag, and Barbie Zelizer.

In *On Photography* Sontag explains her concept of aesthetic distance; that time eventually transforms all photographs into art. Sontag argues that there is an anesthetizing effect in continual contact with photographic representation of world atrocities, as exemplified by her personal experience of witnessing photographs of Bergen-Belsen and Dachau at the age of 12, which pierced her with a deeper resonance than any photograph or real life event has been able to do since.³¹⁹ After many years of seeing photographs of Nazi camps, Sontag believes a saturation limit is reached. In this sense, Sontag proclaims the ethical fragility of the photograph as the camera invites the consumer to view the world's atrocities for aesthetic appreciation under the empty promise of humanity. The more images of horrors are witnessed, the further from reality it becomes to the looking viewer. As Sontag explains:

³¹⁸ Carol Payne, [Assistant Curator at CMCP from 1996-1998 and Art History Professor at Carleton University]. Interview by Jacqueline Sischy. Tape recording. June 5th, 2008. Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada.

³¹⁹ In *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1973, p 19/20) Sontag explains that in Santa Monica in July 1945 by chance she came across a bookstore that contained books with photographs of Bergen-Belsen and Daucher. She writes of the influential experience that , "Nothing I have seen in photographs or in real life ever cut me as sharply, deeply, instantaneously . Indeed, it seems plausible to me to divide my life into two parts, before I saw those photographs (I was twelve) and after, though it was several years before I understood fully what they were about."

To suffer is one thing; another thing is living with the photographed images of suffering, which does not necessarily strengthen conscience and the ability to be compassionate. It can also corrupt them. Once one has seen such images, one has started down the road of seeing more, and more ... after repeated exposure to images it also becomes less real.³²⁰

According to this view, the curatorial premise of *Facing Death: Portraits from Cambodia's Killing Fields*, to bear witness to the moral atrocities of the world, becomes questionable as photography itself cannot affect a true ethical reaction.

Barbie Zelizer has expressed similar skepticism toward photography's ability to produce a political response to photographs of horror:

Despite ample evidence of atrocity as it is taking place, our response to pictures of horror often produces instead helplessness and indifference, by which we do little more than contextualize each instance of horror against those which come before and after. Is the barrage of snapshots of atrocity desensitizing us to the pain of others?³²¹

Zelizer proposes that people may feel so helpless from seeing repetitive images of the world's atrocities that they may be deemed valueless. Atrocities in "Cambodia, East Timor, Rwanda, Somalia, Bosnia, bring on a sense of moral resignation of knowing that

³²⁰ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1973), 20.

³²¹ Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 203.

it is happening again yet feeling powerless to act” Zelizer states, “there may be, then, a shutoff point, a point at which even photographs no longer matter.”³²²

Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas argued in *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture*, that scholarly skepticism towards visual representation of historical trauma has led to the interdisciplinary formations of visual studies and trauma studies, which have profoundly influenced the contemporary course of the humanities. As they argue:

Both formations developed partially in response to the poststructuralist critique of representation that understood the categories of truth and the real as effects of discourse, and therefore, as historical constructs. Visual studies have taken up the task of historicizing the role of the image and visual representation in modern regimes of truth and knowledge. Trauma studies have sought to redeem the category of the real by connecting it to the traumatic historical event, which presents itself precisely as a representational limit, and even a challenge to imagination itself.³²³

Alfredo Jaar’s decision to conceal the thousands of images he took of the Rwandan atrocities speaks to this skeptical sentiment in the photographic medium’s ability to convey the world’s horrors. The political and ethical stakes in visualizing through photography, which Jaar believed could not be adequately represented from his real life experience in Rwanda, motivated his decision to conceal the imagery in the black boxes.

³²² Ibid. 218.

³²³ Francis Guerin and Roger Hallas, introduction to *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture*. Ed Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), 3.

Conversely, Jaar's presentation for the panel discussion, *Genocide and the Collective Remembrance*, suggested a more optimistic role for photographic depictions of atrocity within western culture: the important act of acknowledgement. Genocide historians have blamed the lack of photographic images of the Rwanda Genocide for the lack of international aid and intervention.³²⁴ In the autumn of 1994, French Journalist Edgar Roskis, wrote in *Le Monde Diplomatique* of "un genocide sans images" (a genocide without images).³²⁵ In his article "A Genocide without Images: White Film Noirs" Roskis argues that due to the flight of most foreign journalist, the country's ugly genocide almost went, "very nearly went unrecorded."³²⁶ Investigating how the mainstream media chose to largely ignore Rwanda has been a frequent theme throughout Jaar's artistic oeuvre as seen in such works as *Untitled (Newsweek)* (1994), *Searching for Africa in LIFE* (1996), *From Time to Time* (2006), and *Greed* (2007). For the CMCP panel discussion, *Genocide and the Collective Remembrance*, Jaar addressed the lack of international imagery depicting the atrocity by presenting his work *Newsweek*. The performance includes a presentation of consecutive *Newsweek* magazine covers during the years of the Rwandan genocide. The covers start from April 6th, 1994 a date which signifies the day that the plane carrying the presidents Juvenal Habyarimana of Rwanda and Burundi's Cyprian Ntaryamira were shot down sparking widespread massacre targeting the Tutsi minority and Hutu moderates. Jaar presents every *Newsweek* covers ranging from April through August, which omit any mention of the genocide. While presenting the cover images Jaar reads out a textual narrative outlining the accompanying

³²⁴ Allen Thomas, Ed., *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 4.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Ibid.

timeline of the Rwandan genocidal events. For example, an April 21 1994 edition of *Newsweek* (Figure 48) is presented with the title “Better than Vitamins: The search for the magic pill” next to a text which reads:

April 12 1994: The United Nations Security Council Resolution 912 reduces the UN peacekeeping force in Rwanda from 2,500 to 270. 50,000 deaths.³²⁷

The juxtaposition of the *Newsweek* covers against the historical narrative highlights the negligence of the western media’s attention to the African massacres. Carol Payne explains the impact of the performance, “he keeps showing them until he reaches the first one that mentions the Rwandan genocide, which of course takes years.”³²⁸ Once the image of the Rwandan genocide appears on the *Newsweek* magazine cover, a Rwandan song of mourning is played. Jaar uses the music to commemorate the genocide, while aiding the process of healing. He explains,

The 1994 genocide in Rwanda was a tragedy that is impossible to describe adequately. It took me years to recover from what I saw, and music was a significant part of this healing process.³²⁹

When the music came on, Payne felt an emotional desire within the audience to acknowledge the tragedies:

³²⁷ “Alfredo Jaar” *The Rwanda Project*

http://www.alfredojaar.net/rwanda_web/95newsweek/newsweek.html

³²⁸ Carol Payne, [Assistant Curator at CMCP from 1996-1998 and Art History Professor at Carleton University]. Interview by Jacqueline Sischy. Tape recording. June 5th, 2008. Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada.

³²⁹ Patricia C. Phillips, The aesthetics of witnessing: a conversation with Alfredo Jaar. *Art Journal*, Fall 2005.

You could sort of feel it in your body, you know this yearning for someone to acknowledge this and then when [the image of the genocide] came this incredibly mourning. I thought, to me it was one of those works that really employed aesthetics in a way that was not diminishing, was not diverting but in fact embodied this tremendous sense of mourning. He was specifically of course dealing with Rwanda, but it felt like it gave people a way of thinking.³³⁰

Jaar's performance provides a model of reception whereby the photographic representation of atrocity is not meant to embody the real life event, cause moral outrage, or invoke a political will to act. The simple presence of the photograph on the *Newsweek* cover as a form of acknowledgement and commemoration of the immense tragedy is itself of grave importance. If the S-21 photographs function as an evidential punch, akin to the *Newsweek* cover, ensuring that the deceased victims be acknowledged, then the concerns that the *Facing Death* exhibition risks aestheticizing the grave trauma becomes negligible as the important act of witnessing the genocide overrides the potential moral lapse in beautifying horror.

³³⁰ Carol Payne, [Assistant Curator at CMCP from 1996-1998 and Art History Professor at Carleton University]. Interview by Jacqueline Sischy. Tape recording. June 5th, 2008. Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada.

CONCLUSION

To Bear Witness through Photography: The Moral Significance

Photography as a medium has historically been intricately connected with death. In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag notes that “Ever since cameras were invented in 1830, photography has kept company with death.”³³¹ Martin Jay, author of *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* believes that “by violently stopping the flow of time” photographs introduced a “*memento mori* into visual experience.”³³² Sontag insists that the photograph became a superior medium to any painting as a “memento of the vanished past of the dear departed”³³³ because a photograph is literally a physical trace of that which lived before the lens. The S-21 photographs are the ultimate *mementos mori*, providing a vital example of the material ability of photographs to outlive through representation those they depict.

The dynamic nature of the haunting S-21 photographs is that these images, unlike historical postmortem photographs created throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, were not taken by beloved family members who wished to commemorate their deceased at altars, grave sites, in their homes, or in personal albums. The S-21 photographs were taken through the perverted gaze of the subject’s murdering enemies.

³³¹ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*. (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003) 24.

³³² Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (California: University of California Press, 1994), 135.

³³³ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*. (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003) 23.

There is nothing loving about the context in which the victims were photographically captured. Does their disturbing context alter their commemorative potential?

It is impossible to know how the S-21 victims would want their images to be used for remembrance. Would they like their faces displayed in Gallery Three at MoMA? Or should they be flipped through and gazed at by international viewers in an art book entitled the *Killing Fields*? Would they prefer that their imagery remain solely in Toul Sleng at the site of their last moments? Should it remain unprinted by the Photo Archive Group so they could linger in negative form in the old dusty archival cabinet? Or would the victims want to be circulated internationally to testify to their unlawful fate? Furthermore, while some of the victims may wish their portrait to be exhibited, and others not, there is no way of discerning any of their personal preferences.

The individuals in the portraits have become part of a collective archive and as such the memories of their individual lives are inevitably intertwined into the larger narrative of a regime's tyrannical political reign and a country's decline into genocidal horror. Since their discovery in 1979 at the Tuol Sleng compound, the S-21 images have been exposed to audiences who have all had various degrees of distance and proximity from to the represented subjects. For some, the photographs were used to identify their lost loved ones in the moments following the immediate aftermath of the KR's defeat. For others in the west, the prisoner portraits may have provoked awareness of the Tuol Sleng massacres, marking the viewer's first recognition of the Cambodian genocide. A photograph's meaning depends on the context in which it is presented, and in the case of the potent S-21 portraits, the shifting contexts of their presentations have transformed

their significance from evidential proof intended to mark the execution of the KR's suspected enemies to evidential testimony helping impose legal justice on the victim's killers.

Barbie Zelizer explains in the *Voice of the Visual in Memory* that modern culture's capacity to freeze, replay, and store visual memories for large numbers of people, facilitated by museums, art galleries, television archives, and other visual data banks, enhances our ability to make the past work for the present aims. Therefore discussions of photographic memory, Zelizer argues, become at some level discussions of culture practice of the strategies used to make and collect photographs, retain, recycle, and store them.³³⁴ This cultural theory inspired this thesis's exploration into the manner by which the S-21 photographs were excavated at the Tuol Sleng Prison in 1979, and used within the late 1990s, and early 21st century at North American art museums, shaping the remembrance of Cambodian genocide.

The shifting context of the imagery heightens the ethical stakes in their representation. The photograph's contextual environment can help guide the remembrance of the victim and the circulation and presentation of the imagery are intertwined in a network of political, social, and economic motives. In the latter part of the twentieth century, the S-21 imagery has been incorporated into western consciousness as a tool to help demonize the KR Marxist Stalinist regime. They have been used to mark the loss of the murdered individuals at the Tuol Sleng Museum, act as material traces in an archival form at Cornell University to attest to the regime's brutality, displayed as a

³³⁴ Barbie Zelizer, "The Voice of the Visual in Memory." in *Framing Public Memory*, edited by Kendall R. Phillips, 155-184. (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 161.

harrowing exhibition to help raise the museum goers consciousness at MoMA, and incorporated into a critical discourse about the history of photography at the CMCP. Each of these circumstances suggests a different use for the photographs, but none can secure their absolute meaning. The different locations in which the images are presented mediates the moral weight of their meaning. Susan Sontag has written that “because each photograph is only a fragment, its moral and emotional weight depends on where it is inserted.”³³⁵

The S-21 photographs cannot be neatly placed in a trajectory that encompasses their entire significance, either at the site in the Toul Sleng Museum, their circulation in the western media, at the art museums, or at the tribunal. In a sense the horror of these photographs supersedes any type of societal structure that can appropriately contain this terror. Consequently, critics grappled with appropriate ways to discuss the prints. Whether critiqued in book format, computer screen, or museum wall, critics questioned whether it was acceptable to talk about the aesthetics of the imagery - appropriate to talk about the beautiful light that Ein managed to capture outside of the prison. Was it demeaning to discuss the formal composition of the image given the severity of the content? The ethical fragility of the S-21 images became highlighted as they were usurped into a discourse of western art photography. In *On Photography* Sontag foresees the inevitable potential for all photographs to be transmitted into an interpretive artistic discourse. Sontag explains,

³³⁵ Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1973)106.

One of the central characteristics of photography is that process by which original uses are modified, eventually supplanted by subsequent uses – most notably, by the discourse of art into which any photograph can be absorbed.³³⁶

The photographs have become integrated into a canon of twentieth century western photography whereby the line dividing art photography and photojournalistic work is infinitely blurred. The S-21 exhibition joined the likes of the recent 2000 exhibition *Witness*, which displayed lynching photographs, and the 1995 MoMA exhibition *Silence* showing Gilles Peres photographs of the 1994 violence in Rwanda, by inviting disturbing photography into a gallery milieu.

The critical debate that arose surrounding the appropriateness of aesthetizing the Cambodian trauma through imagery re-awakened a theoretical discussion that had been instigated in the wake of the Second World War when Theodore Adorno warned that to make art about genocide was morally suspect. In the aftermath of the Holocaust Adorno proclaimed a philosophical dictum that after it there can be no art. In the opening of his *Aesthetics Theory*, Adorno declares that “It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore, nor its inner life, not its relation to the world, not even its right to exist.”³³⁷ Alfredo Jaar, Isaac Applebaum, Jack Burman challenged Adorno’s theory in *The Space of Silence* by using conceptual, and aesthetic approaches to address genocidal loss in their artistic practices.

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ Theodore W. Adorno, Gretel Adorno, Rolf Tiedemann. Translated by Robert Hullot-Kento. *Aesthetic Theory*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1997, 1.

How successful were the artists in employing imagery to transmit the occurrences of the respective tragedies? The ability to measure the success of an art exhibition is subjective at best, and in the case of genocidal discourse entirely dependent on the viewers' sensibility. Some viewers may contest the idea that any art can adequately account for real life horror, while others may seek art as an inspiring practice to help overcome, understand, and contemplate the world's atrocities.

The *Space of Silence* and *Facing Death* exhibitions presented various critical approaches to the representing trauma. Isaac Applebaum created a discourse of inquiry into the power of photographs to function as evidential building blocks to help shape historical narratives. Burman successfully asked his viewers to visualize the deserted remains of a landscape barren with the memory of historical trauma. Alfredo Jaar challenged the photographic medium as a potential force to help retell the world's occurrences before the viewers had a chance to contemplate the effects of the imagery. In all the instances, the artists inspired audience members to visually contemplate historical memory of collective traumas.

The S-21 images provided visual testimony to the lost lives depicted in the images. The power of the imagery in representing the real life horror at Tuol Sleng makes them vital components in shaping the western world's understanding of Cambodia's historical events. On writing on the power of the photograph to trigger memory Zelizer explains that,

The force of the photographic image is derived from its powerful capacity to represent the real. Often photography aids the recall of things and events past so effectively that photographs become the primary markers of memory itself.³³⁸

The S-21 images have become the symbols of the Cambodian national trauma and their unique power as evidently material marking lost human lives sparked serious debate regarding the politics of remembrance. Whether the ‘owning’ of the S-21 photographic imagery is ethically sound has been a reoccurring theme throughout the three chapters of this thesis. The exhibition *Photographs from S-21* posed grave risks in privileging the twenty-two victims whose photographs were displayed. The process of selection significantly alters the nature of remembrance for the Cambodian victims and the potential injustice in pushing the remaining non-represented victims out of modern day consciousness rendered the exhibition precarious. Douglas Niven and Christopher Riley may not have considered the moral weight of their decision in selecting the prints. An exhibition is a visual enterprise, and it is only normal that the Photo Archive Group would select what they viewed as the most aesthetically satisfying and emotionally powerful images in order to best express the sorrow of the victim. Whether aesthetics should guide the remembrance of genocide is entirely debatable.

The S-21 installation at the CMCP and MoMA can be read as a form of commemoration turning the environment into a type of cemetery. Zelizer explains that, “Photographs of atrocities are like tombstones: they create a visual space for the dead that

³³⁸ Barbie Zelizer, “The Voice of the Visual in Memory.” In *Framing Public Memory*, ed. Kendall R. Phillips Tuscaloosa, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 2004,160.

anchors the larger flow of discourse about the events that motivated their death.”³³⁹ While the S-21 images can’t tell us about the lives of the victims in the portraits, the exact nature of the events that predicated the massacres, or the precise meaning of the photographic procedure for the KR commanders, the imagery presented in Western culture precipitates the discourse of genocidal history. Isaac Applebaum’s work, *Man Makes Himself*, and Alfredo Jaar’s presentation *Newsweek* reminds viewers about the importance of bearing witness to genocidal history, which can too easily be neglected within historical narration. If the S-21 photographs function as an evidential weight ensuring that the deceased victims be acknowledged, then the concerns that the *Facing Death* exhibition risks aestheticizing the grave trauma becomes negligible as the important act of witnessing the genocide overrides the potential moral lapse in beautifying horror. Susan Sontag concludes *Regarding the Pain of Others* by revisiting her arguments presented in *On Photography* (1977), wherein she wrote that the repeated exposure and saturation of images neutralizes the moral force of the photographed atrocity. Two decades later, Sontag is no longer sure this sentiment is true. She reflects on her earlier belief that the diffusion of vulgar images numbs one’s emotional and ethical responses to horror as conservative. She writes,

In the first of the six essays in *On Photography*, I argued that while an event known through photographs certainly becomes more real than it would have been had one never seen the photographs, after repeated exposure it also becomes less real. As much as they create sympathy, I wrote, photographs shrivel sympathy. Is this true? I thought it was when I wrote it. I’m not sure

³³⁹ Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 203.

now. What is the evidence that photographs have a diminishing impact, that our culture of spectatorship neutralizes the moral force of photographs of atrocity?³⁴⁰

While the photographic replication of the S-21 imagery, along with Applebaum's, Jaar's and Burman's work, may not evoke a political transformation to end the genocide, or come close to transmitting the extent of the horror of the genocidal atrocities they represent, they powerfully acknowledge the historical events and precipitate a dialogue of inquiry. This is enough of a moral impetus for Western audiences to have seen *Facing Death: Portraits from Cambodia's Killing Fields* and *The Space of Silence*.

³⁴⁰ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003), 104.

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Figures

Figure 1

Portrait of Krasnai Rudolfne. Courtesy of Roma Press Center, the Romedia Foundation, and the Rome Museum. Previously exhibited at Holocaust Documentation Center in Budapest.



We've been going for a week, they took us to Komárom to our bunker, they separated the men from the others and took the men away. My poor father told my mother that they are going to take us away but look out for the children! Then they came the next day and took the women away, the young women who had no family. Well, my older sister Aranka was 18. What should she do not to be taken away. She took one of my sisters and one of my younger brothers up, they didn't tell her anything. She should go with the others remaining. We've been suffering there for two weeks in the mud, in the water, there were so many dead that we've gotten infected with typhoid fever.

Figure 2

United Nations Mobile Exhibition. Courtesy of Aegis Trust. This exhibition was launched at the United Nations Headquarters in New York on April 7 2007, the 13th Anniversary of the beginning of the Rwandan Genocide.

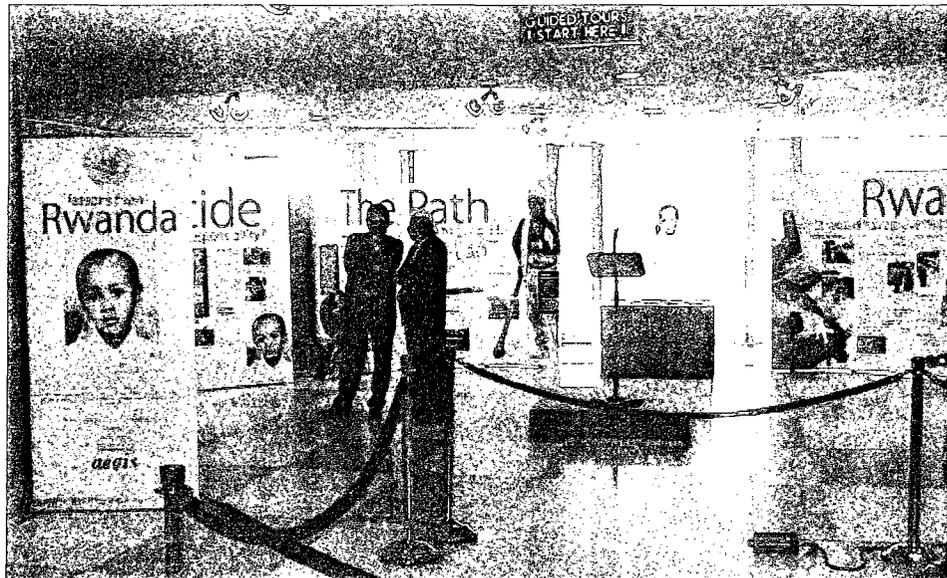


Figure 3

Rupert Bazambanza *Smile Through the Tears* (2005). Bazambanza, who was born in 1975, survived the Rwandan genocide and subsequently emigrated to Montreal in 1997 where he lives and works as a graphic artist. The graphic novel depicts the true story of a Tutsi family, the Rwangas, and their fate before, during and after the genocide.

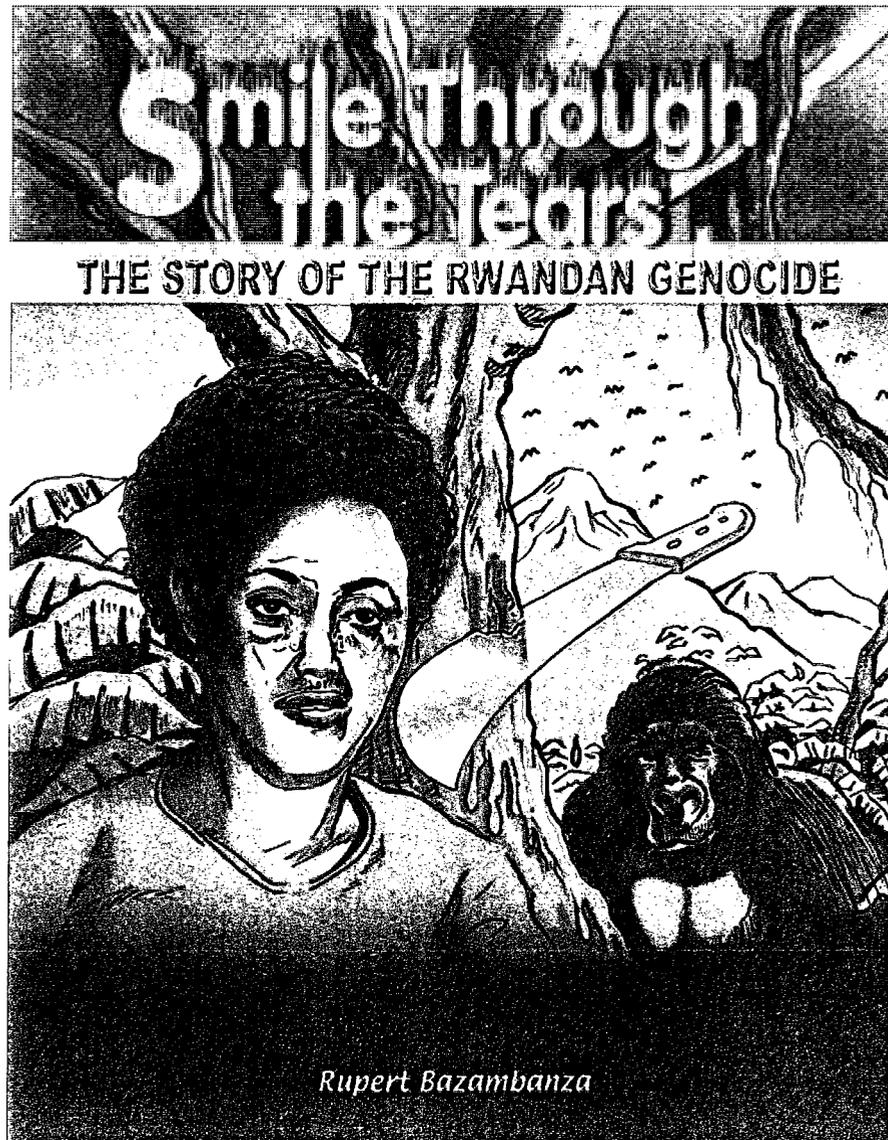


Figure 4

“Bombing” The Children of Darfur Surviving Genocide. Courtesy of Darfur Alert Coalition

The Children of Darfur: Surviving Genocide. The drawings were collected by Dr. Jerry Ehrlich, a pediatrician who worked with Doctors Without Borders in Darfur. Dr. Ehrlich told the children, ‘Draw what your life in Darfur is.’

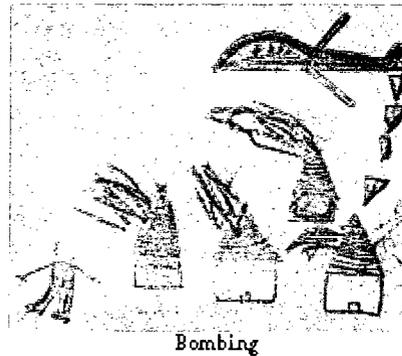


Figure 5

“Janjaweed Attack” The Children of Darfur Surviving Genocide. Courtesy of Darfur Alert Coalition The Children of Darfur: Surviving Genocide.



Figure 6

Courtesy Cambodian Genocide Program, Yale University.

Name unknown

Front view of head and shoulders, Male, Clothed, Adult

Black & white

Photographed by S-21 (1975-1979), Restored by Photo Archive Group (1994), &
Scanned by DC-Cam (1995-1996), KH TSL



00016

Figure 7

Courtesy Cambodian Genocide Program, Yale University.

Name unknown

Black & white, Damaged

Front view of head and shoulders, Female, Clothed, Child

Photographed by S-21 (1975-1979), Restored by Photo Archive Group (1994), &
Scanned by DC-Cam (1995-1996), KH TSL



02055

Figure 8

Courtesy Cambodian Genocide Program, Yale University.

Name unknown

Black & white

Front view of head and shoulders, Female, Clothed, Elderly.

Photographed by S-21 (1975-1979), Restored by Photo Archive Group (1994), &
Scanned by DC-Cam (1995-1996)



03215

Figure 9

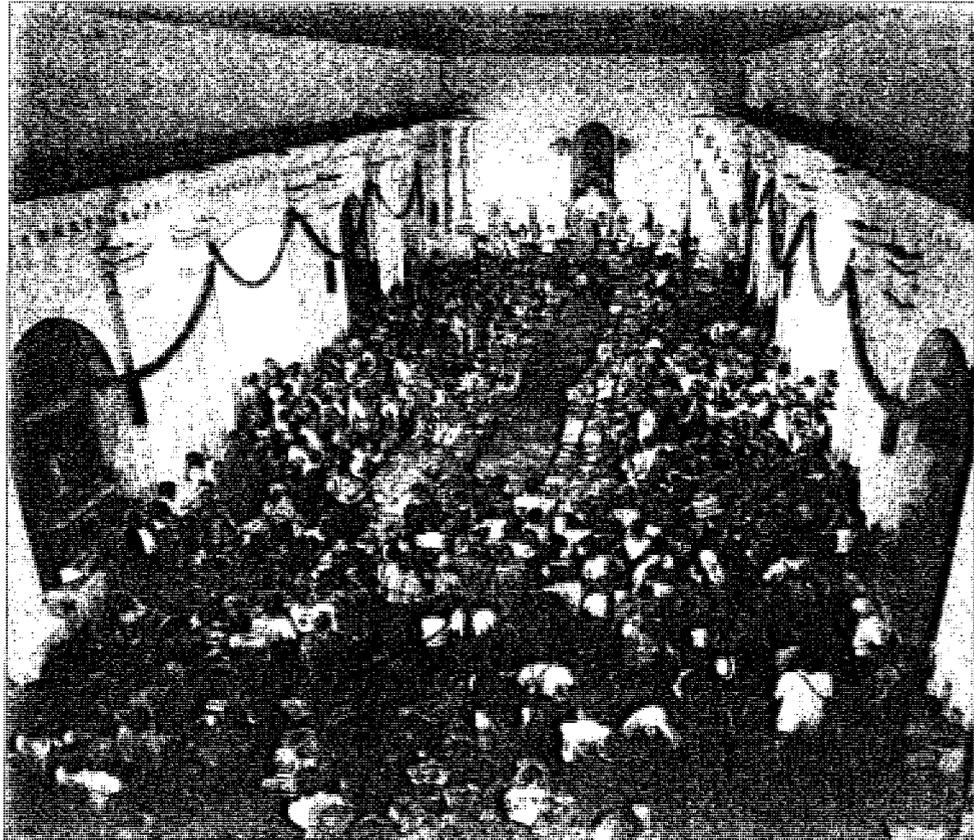
Jonathan Moller, "*Burying the Remains*" Our Culture is our Resistance: Repression, Refuge and Healing in Guatemala. 1993-2001. New York: PowerHouse Books, 2004.



Villagers prepare to bury the remains of fifteen people in the cemetery of this village of Nebaj. Quiché, July 29, 2001.

Figure 10

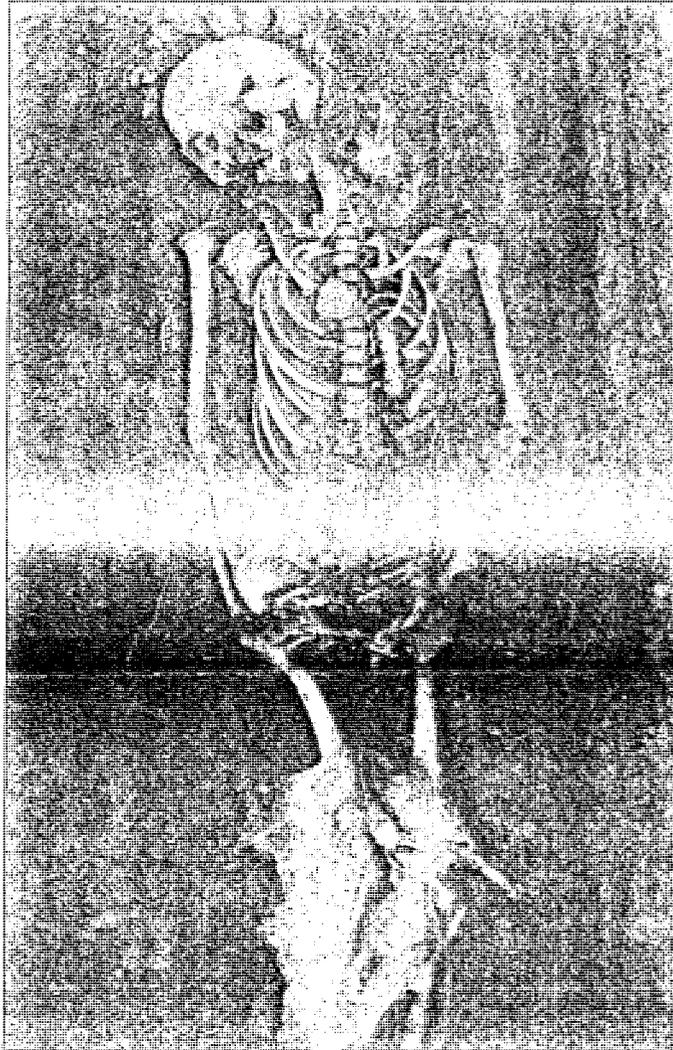
Jonathan Moller, "*Mourners*" Our Culture is our Resistance: Repression, Refuge and Healing in Guatemala. 1993-2001. New York: PowerHouse Books, 2004.



Mourners honour the remains and memories of 120 people at a church Mass. The remains were exhumed from more than fifty clandestine cemeteries over the course of a year and a half in twenty-two villages of the municipality of Santa Maria Nebaj. Quiché, July 27, 2001.

Figure 11

Jonathan Moller, "The Remains of a Woman" Our Culture is our Resistance: Repression, Refuge and Healing in Guatemala. 1993-2001. New York: PowerHouse Books, 2004.



The remains of a woman who was killed by members of a paramilitary Civil Defense Patrol while she was in hiding in the mountains. Her husband and son secretly buried her here two days after she was killed, in September 1983. Near the village of Janlay, Nebaj, Quiché, 2001.

Figure 12

Pol Pot addresses a closed meeting in Phnom Penh after the 1975 Khmer Rouge victory.



Figure 13

Young Khmer Rouge soldiers in 1975.



Figure 14

This former high school in Phnom Penh became "S-21," nerve center of the Khmer Rouge secret police; today it is the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide.

Photograph by Ben Kiernan, 1980. Courtesy Cambodian Genocide Program, Yale University

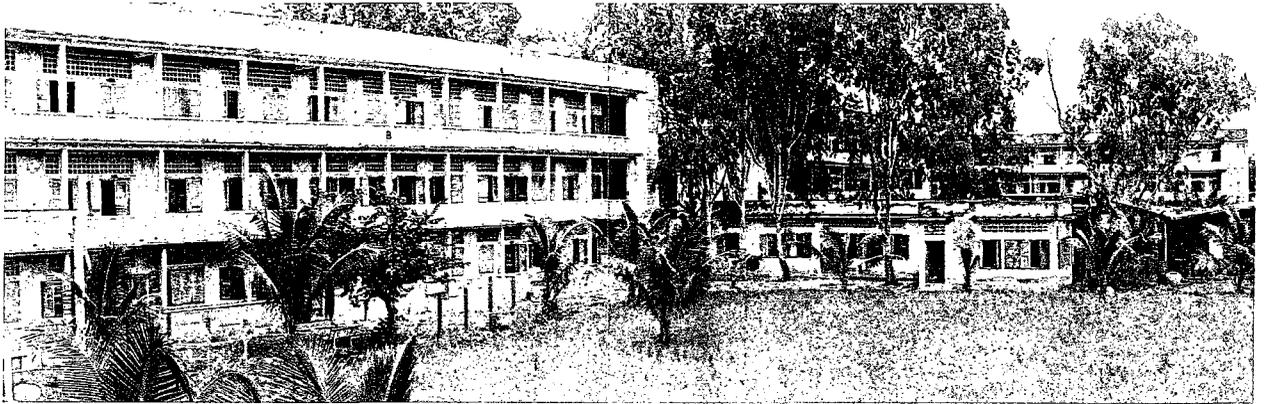
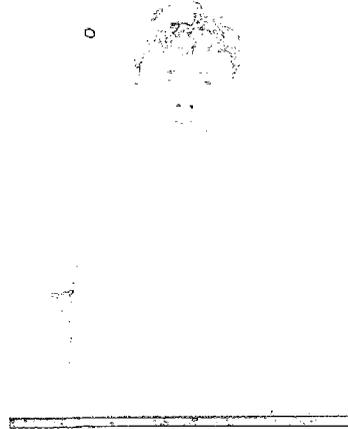


Figure 15

Passport size S-21 photographs. Courtesy Cambodian Genocide Program, Yale University. Restored by Photo Archive Group (1994), & Scanned by DC-Cam (1995-1996)



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00598



00278

00222

00264

Figure 16

Khmer Rouge leader leads group of peasants during a propaganda photograph.



Figure 17

Khmer Rouge peasant farmers in propaganda photograph, outside Phnom Penh.



Figure 18

Interior of Tuol Sleng Prison, a torture house used by the Khmer Rouge between 1975-1979, where 14,000 were killed.

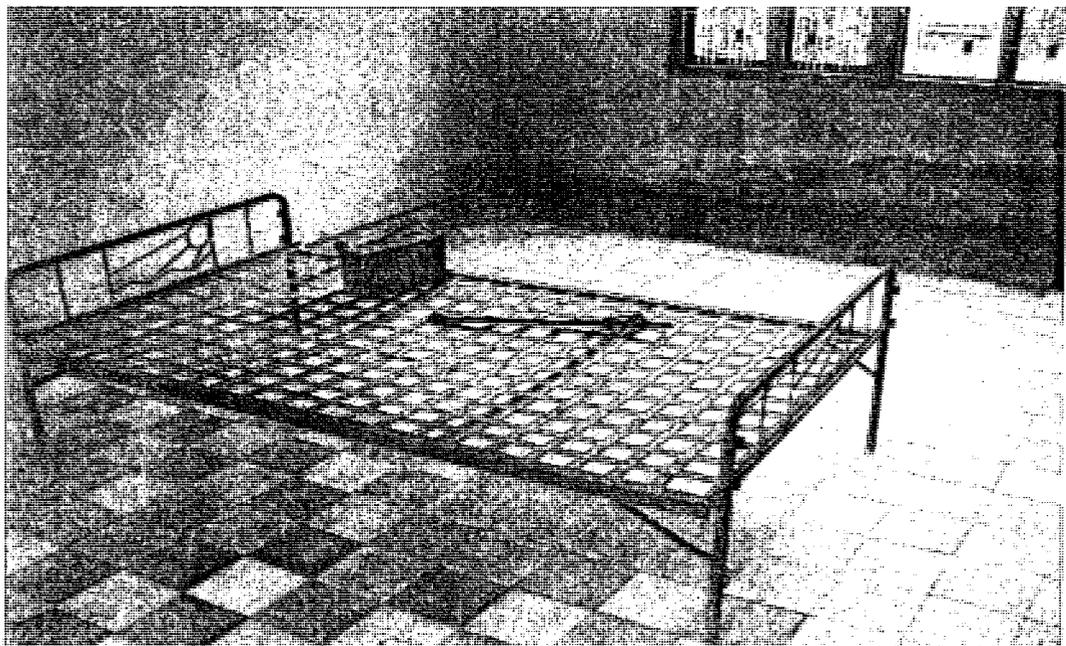


Figure 19

Presentation of S-21 images at Toul Sleng Museum, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.



Figure 20

Skull map that was on display in the former S-21 prison camp at Tuol Sleng, in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

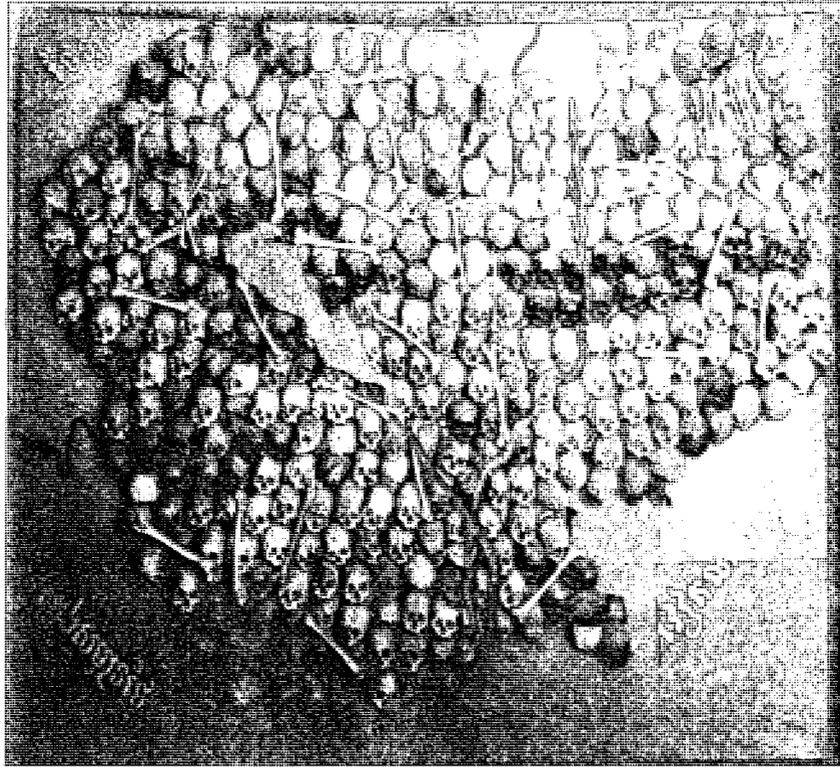


Figure 21

S-21 images in contact sheet format. John M. Echols Collection on Southeast Asia at Cornell University. Photograph taken by Jacqueline Sischy, July, 2008.



Figure 22

S-21 images in negative format. John M. Echols Collection on Southeast Asia at Cornell University. Photograph taken by Jacqueline Sischy, July, 2009.

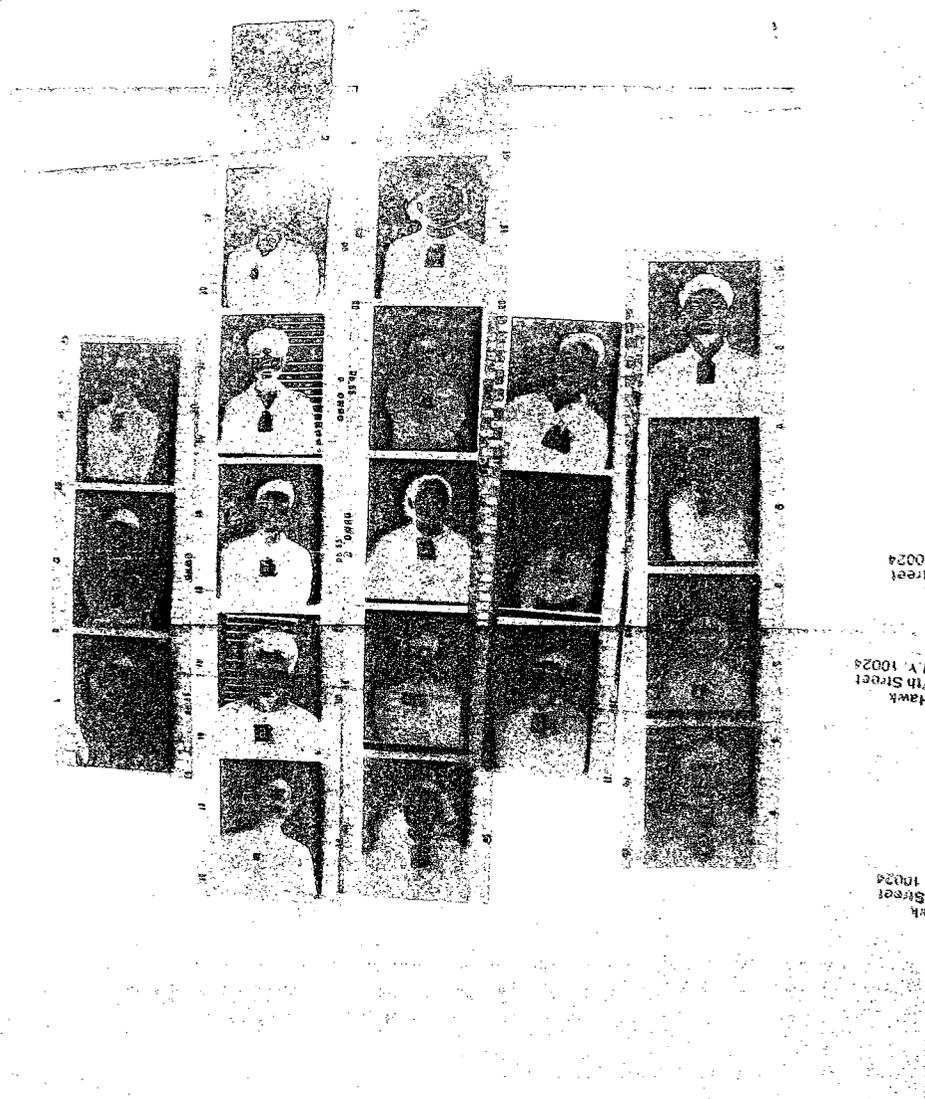


Figure 23

S-21 images in binder format. John M. Echols Collection on Southeast Asia at Cornell University. Photograph taken by Jacqueline Sischy, July, 2009.



Figure 24

S-21 images in binder format. John M. Echols Collection on Southeast Asia at Cornell University. Photograph taken by Jacqueline Sischy, July, 2009.

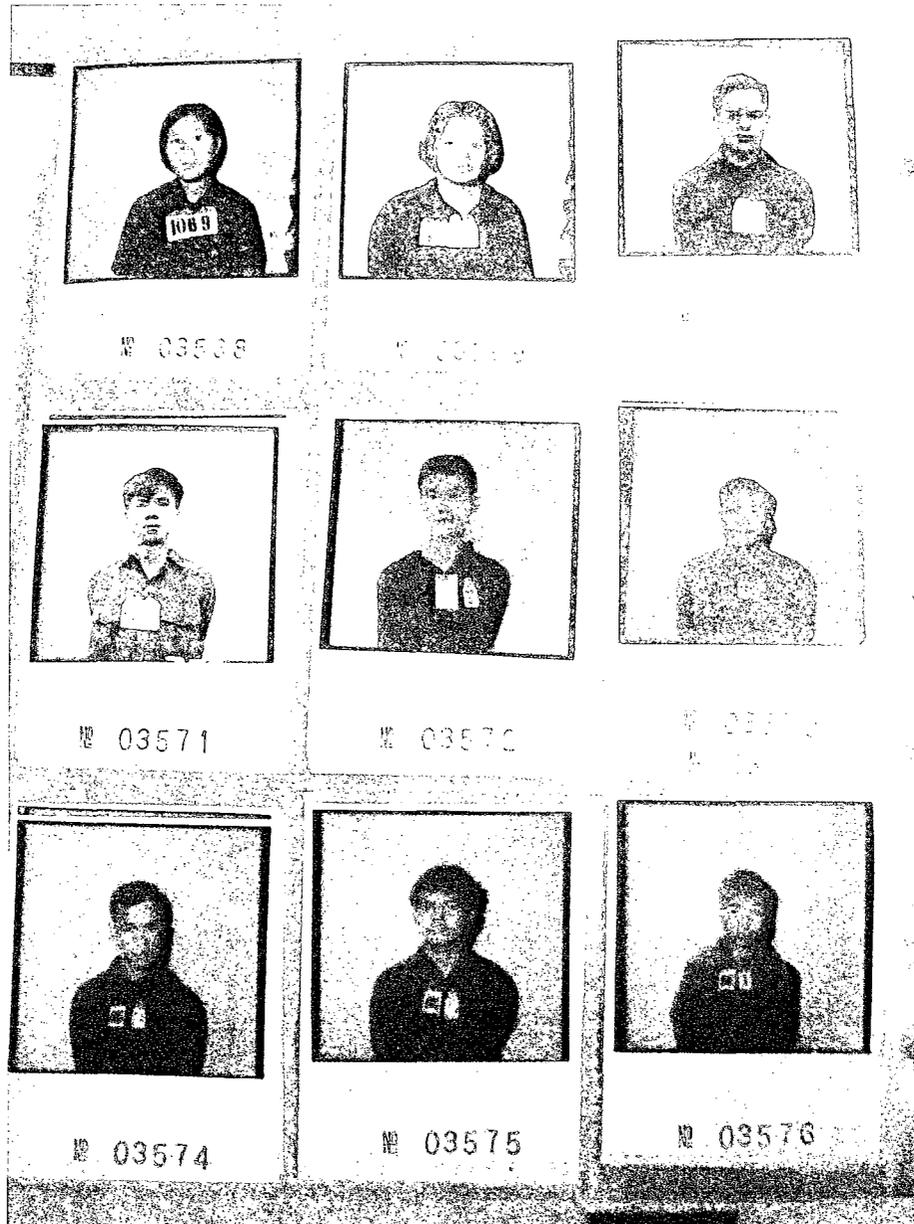


Figure 25

S-21 images in binder format. John M. Echols Collection on Southeast Asia at Cornell University. Photograph taken by Jacqueline Sischy, July, 2009.

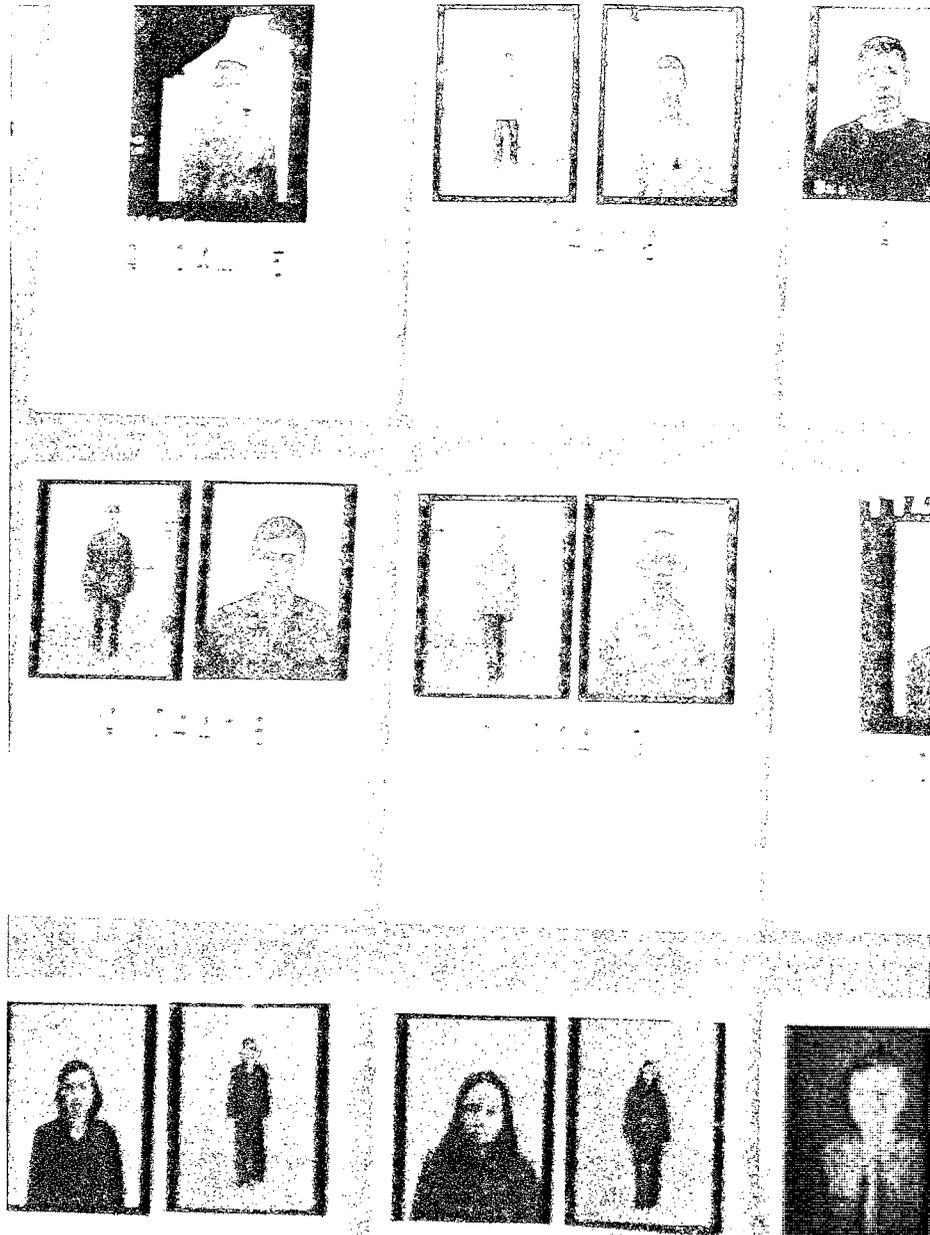


Figure 26

S-21 images in binder format. John M. Echols Collection on Southeast Asia at Cornell University. Photograph taken by Jacqueline Sischy, July, 2009.

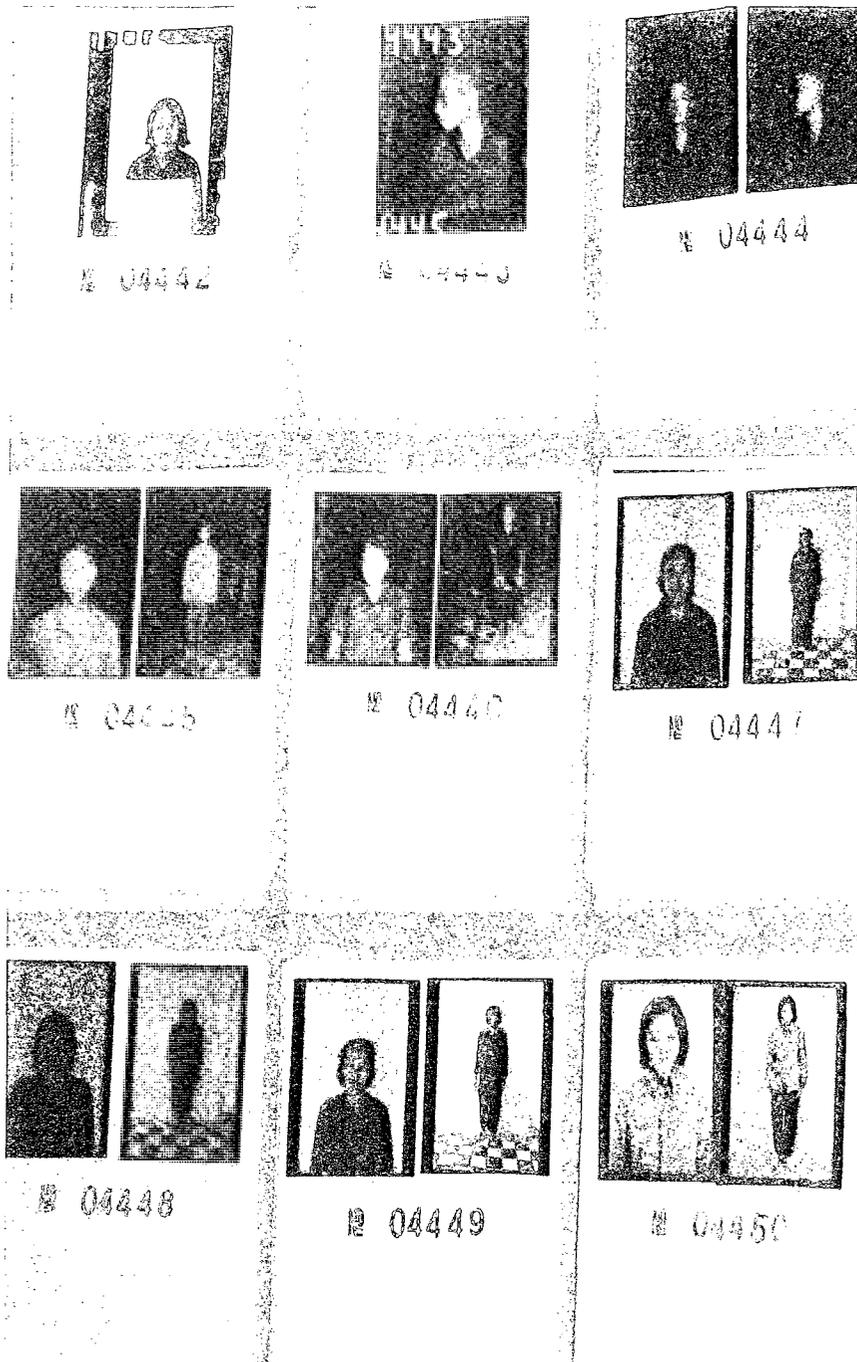


Figure 27

S-21 images in binder format. John M. Echols Collection on Southeast Asia at Cornell University. Photograph taken by Jacqueline Sischy, July, 2009.

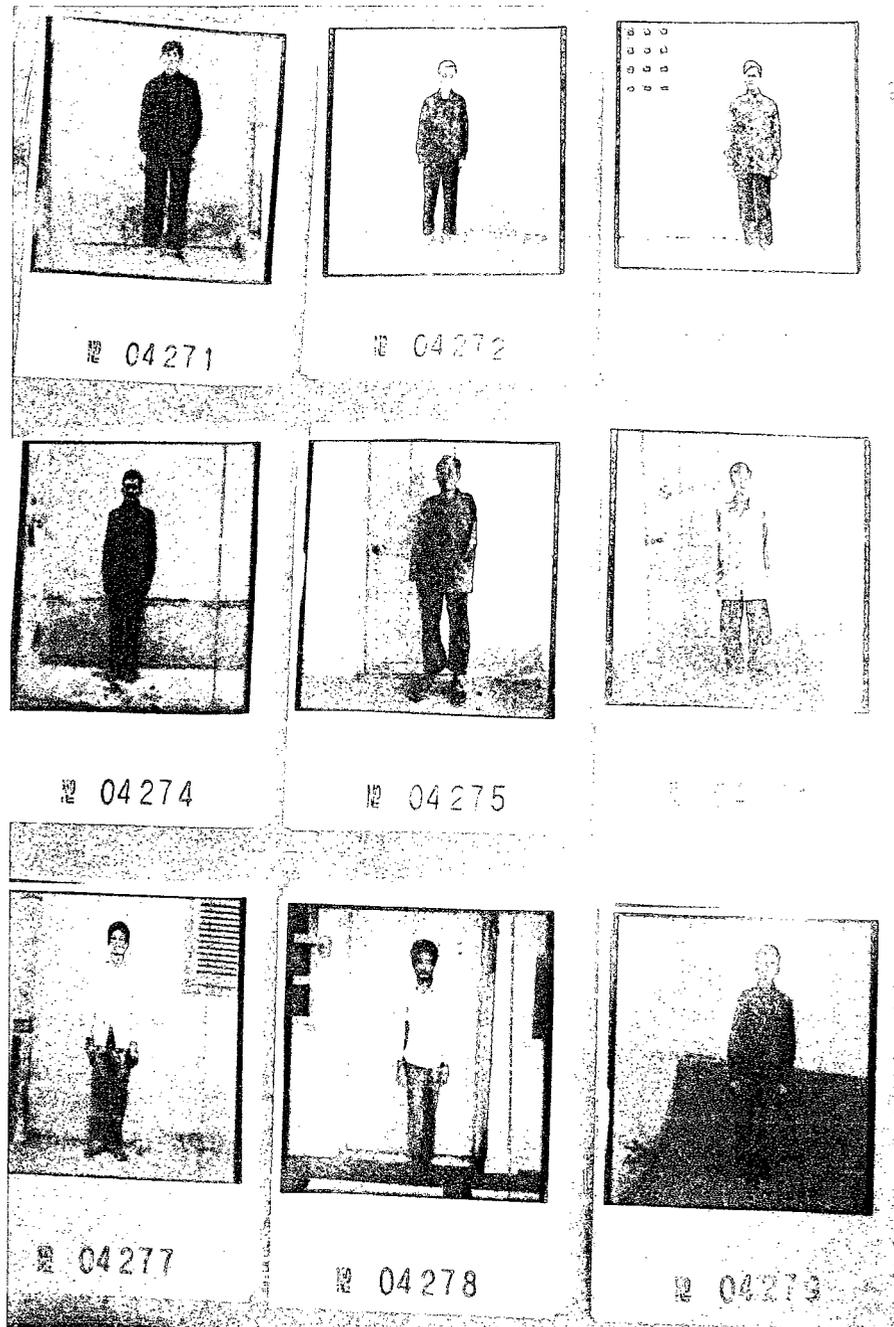


Figure 28

S-21 images in binder format. John M. Echols Collection on Southeast Asia at Cornell University. Photograph taken by Jacqueline Sischy, July, 2009.



Figure 29

S-21 images in binder format. John M. Echols Collection on Southeast Asia at Cornell University. Photograph taken by Jacqueline Sischy, July, 2009.



Figure 30

The Killing Fields (Hardcover) by Chris Riley (Editor), Douglas Niven (Editor Santa Fe, NM: Twin Palms Publishers, 1996)



Figure 31

Kaing Guek Eav, known as Duch, appears in at a pretrial hearing November 21st, 2007. Phnom Penh, Cambodia.



Figure 32

Lewis Hine. *Mill Children in Macon* (1909).

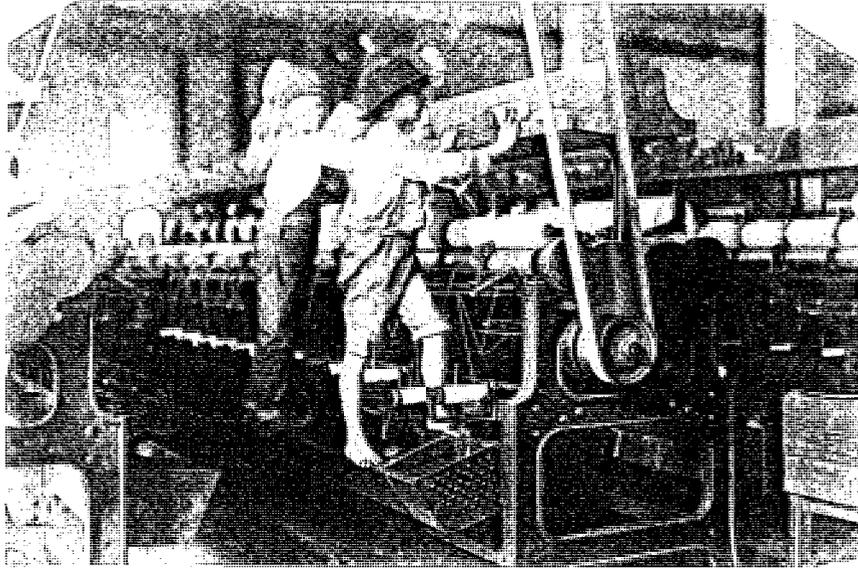


Figure 33

Titian. *The Flaying of Marsyas* (1575-76).



Figure 34

Eddie Adams. Photograph of General Nguyễn Ngọc Loan executing a Vietcong prisoner, Nguyễn Văn Lém, on a Saigon street, February 1, 1968.



Figure 35

Untitled. 1975-1979

The Museum of Modern Art

Gelatin-silver print, printed 1994

10"x10"

The Arthur M. Bullowa Fund and Geraldine Murphy Fund.

Photograph taken by Jacqueline Sischy, May 2008.



Figure 36

Untitled. 1975-1979

Gelatin-silver print, printed 1994

10"x10"

The Museum of Modern Art

The Arthur M. Bullowa Fund and Geraldine Murphy Fund.

Photograph taken by Jacqueline Sischy, May 2008.

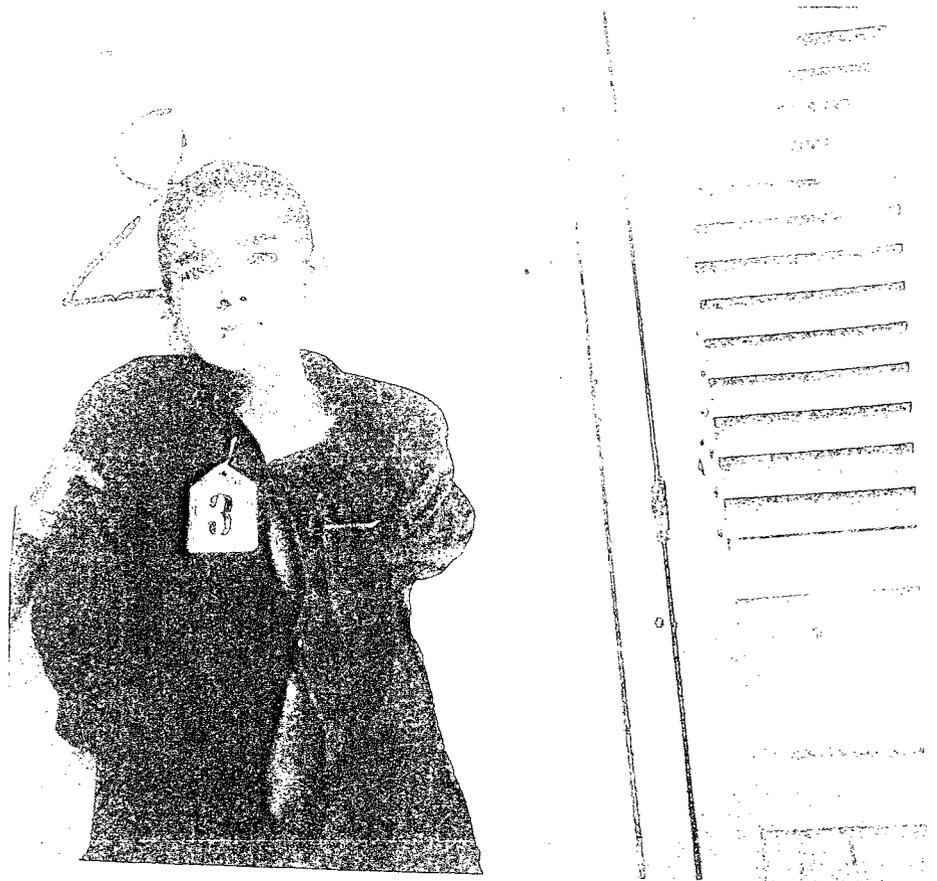


Figure 37

Untitled. 1975-1979

Gelatin-silver print, printed 1994

10"x10"

The Museum of Modern Art

The Arthur M. Bullowa Fund and Geraldine Murphy Fund.

Photograph taken by Jacqueline Sischy, May 2008.



Figure 38

Photographer Unknown

Untitled (Prisoner of the Khmer Rouge; terrified man). 1975-1979

Gelatin-silver print, printed 1994

10"x10"

The Museum of Modern Art

The Arthur M. Bullowa Fund and Geraldine Murphy Fund.

Photograph taken by Jacqueline Sischy, May 2008.



Figure 39

Untitled. 1975-1979

Gelatin-silver print, printed 1994

10"x10"

The Museum of Modern Art

The Arthur M. Bullowa Fund and Geraldine Murphy Fund.

Photograph taken by Jacqueline Sischy, May 2008.



Figure 40

Untitled. 1975-1979

Gelatin-silver print, printed 1994

10"x10"

The Museum of Modern Art

The Arthur M. Bullowa Fund and Geraldine Murphy Fund.

Photograph taken by Jacqueline Sischy, May 2008.



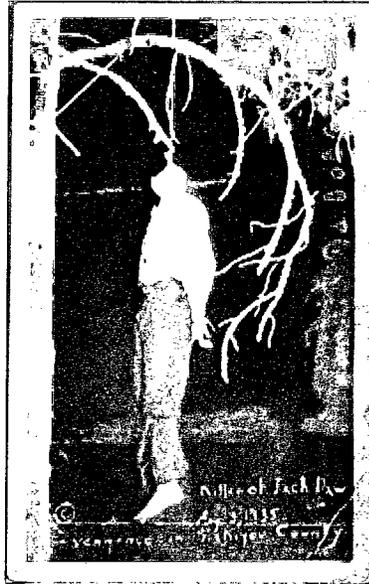
Figure 41

Without Sanctuary: Photographs and Postcards of Lynching in America.

The corpse of Clyde Johnson. August 3, 1935 . Yreka, California.

Gelatin silver print. Real photo postcard. 3.1/2 x 5 3/8 in.

Etched in the negative, "Killer of Jack Daw Aug 3, 1935 vengence in Siskiyou County."



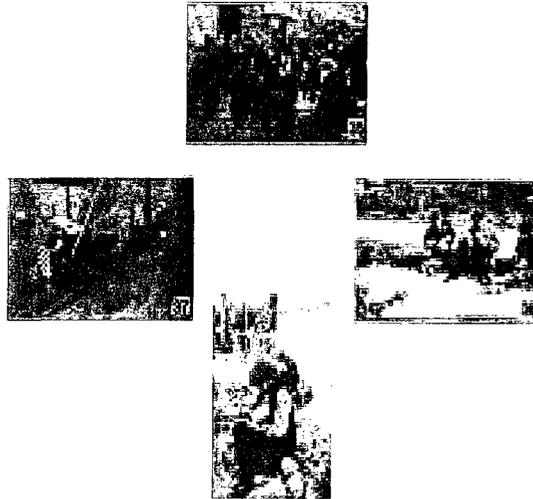
Unidentified corpse of African American male. Gallows, courthouse-jail, and windmill in background. Nine onlookers, two young boys. 1900-1915. Location unknown.

Gelatin silver print. Real photo postcard. 3 x 5 in.



Figure 42

Isaac Applebaum. "Page from Holocaust scrapbook." *Man Makes Himself* (1985).



© 1985 by Isaac Applebaum. All rights reserved.

Figure 43

“Detail from Holocaust scrapbook.” *Man Makes Himself* (1985).



Figure 44

Isaac Applebaum. "Keegstra Poster." *Man Makes Himself* (1985).



Figure 45

Isaac Applebaum. "Detail from installation." *Man Makes Himself* (1985).



Figure 46

Isaac Applebaum. "Detail from installation." *Man Makes Himself* (1985).



Figure 47

Jack Burman from the installation "Remain Silent," Auschwitz-Birkenau (1994-1997)

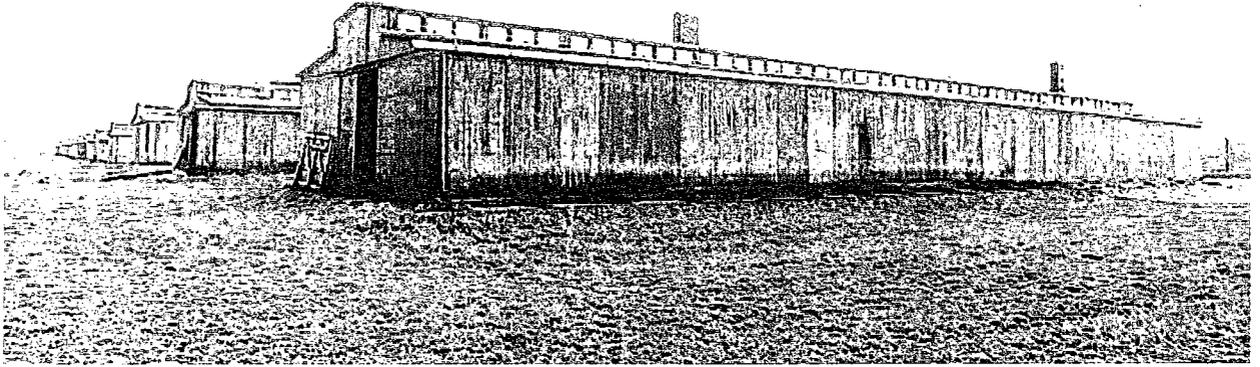


Figure 48

Alfredo Jaar. "Four views of the installation." *Real Pictures* (1994).
In this installation, the photographs are present, but withheld from view.

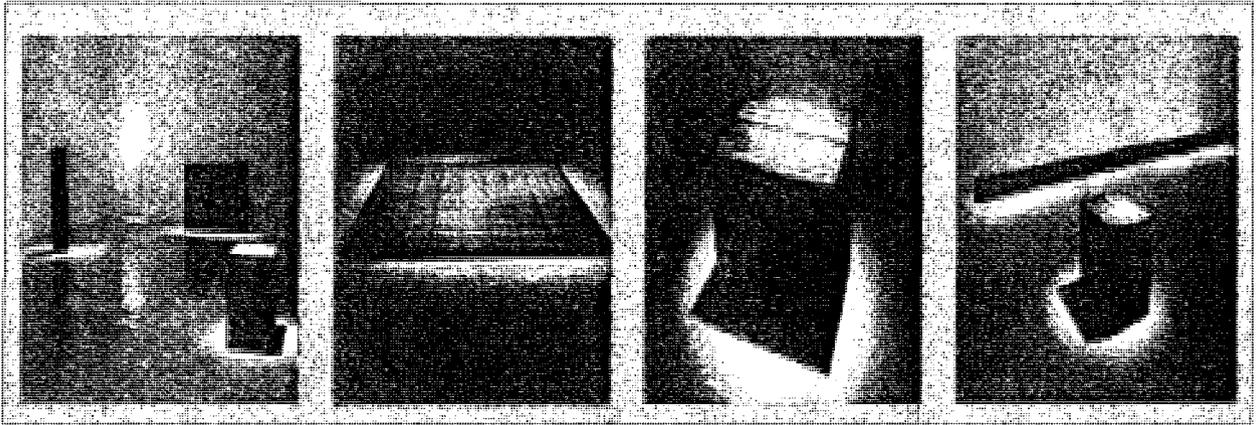


Figure 49

Alfredo Jaar. "Newsweek" *Untitled (Newsweek)* 1994

